

2052: An Existential Crisis

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Spring

The Abyss of Nothing: Part I

The year was 2052. Life was dying. Earth was a sphere of lava. They looked at the screen in their spaceship and wondered in despair. Sometimes the light is as dark as the darkness itself. Amidst the dripping distant dim radiation of the stars and galaxies, the cold realities of life dawned on them. That they were mortal and time was running thin. There is the dark in this world and then there is the darkness. They looked outside at the damp loneliness of the universe; the hollow dots of starlight were submerged in a pure tight emptiness. They looked at Earth burning on the screen inside the space ship and wondered about the friends and family they had left behind. The blue planet was a sea of fire. They saw rivers boiling to a steam, mountains crumbling and forests burning. Was this the retribution of God?

Now they questioned the future of man and what was to become of the animal that could use language. They could only wait for death to slowly choke them. The oxygen could only last another week and the food was running short. Yet despite this death sentence, there were none who were equipped to take their own lives and they had that choice. They would fight till the end, clinging on to a vague hope of eternal life. On Earth people killed themselves every day despite being free and perhaps that is why they did kill themselves, because they were voluntarily permitted to do so. They would look at each other and look out into the recesses of space and they could see their lives flashing before them and they saw their youth and their adolescence and their transformation into manhood and it made them sad that they were facing the possibility that life would be no more. Each of them came to recognise that time was precious and that they were human. They lay in gaze at the reality of it all with the dark reaches of the universe piercing the corners of their imaginations. They would laugh and talk and recite their heroics in life and smoke cigarettes knowing that nothingness was impending. Some were calm and were resigned to their fate, while some were anxious and worried about eternal negation. They looked at the burning planet and sought answers for its flamed fate. Maybe it was because the people had been so selfish. Maybe it was the needless wars, the gratuitous violence or the abuse of animals. Maybe it was the pollution of rivers, the destruction of rain forests or the melting of the ice-caps. Maybe it was because

of the corrupt hearts of men. Or maybe, just maybe, it was life. They looked at each other and gazed into the mistakes of their retrospective souls and saw the limits of their intuition. They discussed all the living they had done, the beers drank on the hot humid days, the fights, the parties, the joys and worries of living when they were alive. They realized how foolish they were to be distressed when on Earth, given that in truth a certain death awaited them no matter how they approached life or how they lived. The silence became a release from the expectations of society. The darkness awoke a beacon of knowledge within their anxiety ridden hearts. They finally saw when they actually could not see, for it was the bleak universe that ambushed their last refuge before they perished in the sands of the abandoned.

The ships were about the size of a grocery store. They had provisions for food that could last eighteen months and that was only prolonging the inevitable. They had been built in space as it was too heavy to launch from Earth such was the weight they exerted. There were dorms for beds and a kitchen area and a sort of day area even though there was no longer any need for such things in space. They were housed with a sizeable amount of distilled water which was rationed to every person. Why they rationed the supplies was bewildering for the supplies would run out at some stage regardless.

There were many ships built, for when the Earth was destined to be no more, the minds and hearts of men looked for an escape no matter how futile that escape would turn out to be. It is said that the animal always fights to the bitter end to maintain its survival. The gazelle will kick at the hyenas that devour it; the mouse will bite and scratch the snake whose fangs penetrate its neck and man faced with a terminal cancer lives on as if he will live perpetually. Thus, these magnificent feats of engineering were built in a desperate attempt to prolong the durability of the species that is man. It took three years from initial concept to the finished article that was tested and deemed safe for use. The designs had been in the vault of an engineering firm for some time but it was only when the end was nigh and man's desperation reached evaporation point that the construction was fast tracked. Some men or I suppose most men were convinced this would be the road to heaven or to a greener pasture just like the conquistadors who landed on South America all those years ago in search of the riches and freedom that those undiscovered lands possessed. Men have a habit of only seeing the gold when it is in fact pyrite they clutch in their tight grasp. The ships were initiated into production quickly. Men slaved themselves with

the promise that their family would be taken care of. The governments provided the finance for such an expedition on the same premise, that they themselves and their loved ones would be some of the few lucky inhabitants that would make the trip into space. Space was the last frontier of the troubled soul. Men were blasted into the outer echelons of space to piece together these mother ships. Many of them never returned to Earth again. Many of them never saw their families again.

Construction in space was difficult given the lack of gravity that men were accustomed to. It was hard to engineer and piece together the materials that were required. We take everything for granted in life said a poet; gravity, food, freedom and most of all existence itself. The space workers had come to realize this for what started as a new journey, morphed into a difficult expedition fraught with danger, death and suicide. Just as the legions of young men flocked to the trenches of war on sheer bravado and determined to live, they gradually learn in the freezing temperatures and the lice infected mucky habitat that they were deceived by their own lust for feeling alive. There was no gravity in space, the luxury of a carvery dinner was non-existent, it was hard to sleep in the zero-g world, socializing and drinking and being happy was not afforded. Then they had to work in such precarious conditions, tied onto the mother ship while they slaved to build what were the last salvation of man. Many gave up and simply cut their air supply whilst suspended against the merciless universe. They couldn't take the certainty of death or maybe the certainty of never seeing their loved ones again.

All in all, they could not take the definiteness of what life now threw at them. Back on Earth it was all a great illusion and people were convinced that they would live forever and that harm and death were foreign concepts that could not be applied to their uniqueness and their life. Life was splendid on Earth with the blue skies and hazy sunsets and the ability to convince yourself that you were worthy. One of the most profoundly sad truths that men came to realize was that they were led to believe they had purpose and had something of note to say and something of greatness to achieve. They were while alive induced to believe that they had duty in life; that it wasn't all meaningless and that immortality was achievable. Alas the brazen darkness of the universe eclipsed only by the drops of starlight put that motivation to its death. In the silence, they discovered the pure incentive to live was essentially nothing.

Some men soldiered on and found reason in that they had no other choice. It was simply death now or death later and nothing could be done to evade this hostile darkness. Those men were extolled for their mental strength and their fearless character to work daily on the ships without anxiety. But such men were rare. For every thousand men that were sent to their deaths, only one or two possessed the temperament deemed acceptable, for most men conscripted for the adventure on the condition that life would work itself out and that humanity would not be condemned to extinction. They would talk to families at home under instruction to lie to them about the fate of the ships, for if they told them the truth, society would revolt even more than it was already doing. The men, women and children left behind were under the illusion that life would be preserved. They held such false beliefs because that is what the powers-that-be told them. They fed them lies because those lies were what they wished to hear. People want to believe what they want to be true; not what is true. Thus, man was persuaded through his defective emotional capacity that life would soldier on and the trees would regrow and the rivers would flow from the mountains. The people demanded to be lectured on the sustainability of life and its glorious future, not its destiny to become a dungeon of lifelessness. Thus, they were through the media and propaganda machines lied to daily in order to keep the peace and prevent a mass riot taking place. They were sedated on delusion and its opium kept them content at least until it was too late to rebel.

They then got angry when the truth became unbearable, blaming the government and the rich for not doing enough for the poor and impoverished of society and even when the select few were chosen at random for the trip to space, the majority still questioned the integrity of the government. The majority got enraged and fervently demanded that something be done about this speck of dust that could be seen with one's sight in the night's sky. Like the guilty man who is escorted to the firing squad, it is only in those last steps, when he is blindfolded that the realities of the landscape will pierce his veins. Prior to that moment he lies asleep in a stupor engulfed with the dichotomy of everlasting life as preached by the religions and comforts himself with such a belief. "What can the bullets do?" he asks. But when he hears the gun's cock, he knows deep within, there is nothing beyond this three-dimensional realm we call the universe.

Anxiety about death is to be avoided at all costs and the mind goes out of its way to avoid the decisive question of life. How does it avoid it though? It does

so through immersing the mind in what we call qualities of life. Hence the merry men and women marry and assume such a conventional existence, not to live but to avoid. This is what the apprehension of the asteroid brought. It was not that Earth would be destroyed or that society would perish in severe pain. No not at all. The anxiety was laden with greed. What would become of the individual who had worked so hard in such an honest life and who had never broken the law at all? They could not accept such a distraught deal and they only believed in God when they were faced with the imminent reality of death. For would god exist if we lived forever? God had deserted them just like he had countless times down through the history of mankind. From the Jews who were gassed in Poland to the individual who felt he or she had been wronged by life. When had god ever even showed his hand, let alone responded. Yes, the despicable truth that religion was a sham was being verified at every passing second as the rock moved closer to its intended target.

The seeds for this destruction were sowed a long time before man could even speak. Such is the enormity of the universe that the asteroid had been on a collision course with Earth for billions of years. In fact, before Earth had even spawned its oceans and forests and was just a spherical lump of molten lava, this asteroid had been on its course. It had plundered along in a neighbouring stars arena around the two billion years mark after The Big Bang and had collided with other asteroids. Like a ping pong ball its last hit set it on a trajectory towards mother Earth and it would spend four billion years on such a path and it was equipped with such will to strike down the blue planet. It's strange in that the odds of this happening in the universe given its incomprehensible size and given just how small both Earth and the asteroid actually are, would have been a flat zero. An infinite zero almost, but I emphasize the word almost. It was highly improbable that such an event would occur but not impossible and there is a subtle difference. Life is but a stream of probabilities.

What were the odds of a certain someone surviving this impact? They were pretty much the same odds for everyone regardless of gender, education, sexuality, religion or even personality. The statisticians that worked for the government looked at this element of destruction and tried to deduce what would become of the legions of men and women. Would they be set free or would they burn or choke to death? Alas it was concluded that 100% of the world would be stricken with the same fate. 100% of the world would suffer

and die alone. The number of people that the 100% represented was utterly redundant. It could have represented seven billion people or seven hundred people, but that is not the point for the asteroid was not human and had no conscience with regards the suffering it would unleash. The masses could not comprehend this fact though. They did not see seven billion people; no they only saw themselves and their own plight and therefore lived under the guise that they would be redeemed by the government or maybe god. Man really only cares for his own fate. The destiny of others is irrelevant to him in the grander schemes of his psyche. What the people failed to realize is how miniscule the asteroid made man. The hordes of soon to be perished custodians of the planet even when faced with a wall of thunder raining down on their hearts were led to believe that because they were human and could dream and talk, that they were deserving of a pardon from this sea of suffering. Right until their last drop of air they would be convinced of an eternal realm in which perfection was achievable, when no such thing existed. There was only one life and nothing existed beyond what did exist. The asteroid was coming and it was bringing a tsunami of pain with it and it would strike Earth and man would be cast asunder despite the protests of the faithful and the ignorance of the intelligent.

It was not NASA or the brains in Europe that spotted this passive beast initially. In fact, it was an amateur astronomer with a keen eye for irregularities that first picked up on this unknown little stone in a small patch of the dark sky. He raised the alarm with the powers that be who then executed analysis on the asteroid itself. Initially it was just a harmless piece of rock and they did not really give to it the respect and time it deserved and then when they ran its algorithm and calculated its approximate size and found that it was heading for Earth, they still didn't believe it. Like the narcissist in court who fiercely contests his sentence, the experts of NASA and their partners in Europe initially vehemently denied to the public and to themselves most of all, that this little rock on the horizon was actually death in a black cape. "There is no chance of that happening," they would scorn at the young programmers and after running the simulation a hundred times in correlation with its size, they gradually and painfully began to accept that death was hurling towards Earth at 60,000 miles per hour. The asteroid looked tiny from afar and appeared harmless. But this asteroid with each passing day and the rising of the sun would grow in stature until it was too big to barter with. The asteroid was enormous. It was about the size of Iceland in terms of its two-dimensional surface area, if one was looking at it in front view. Alas if it were only two dimensional it would have been

harmless. Its three dimensions gave to it a power that would not alone wipe every living species off the planet, but also knock Earth out of its trajectory slightly. There was no two ways about it. The asteroid would destroy everything bar maybe bacteria or a rat that might get lucky and live for a while longer. The NASA executive when relayed this harrowing information opened up a bottle of whiskey and sat for three hours in his office contemplating his life and the future of mankind and the universe. He faced having to go home and tell his wife and children that they would not live to see the next decade. Nobody would see the next decade or any decade for the next two billion years for that matter.

It was calculated that the asteroid would hit somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean with such power that it would be the equivalent of ten thousand Tsar Bombs detonating together. The Tsar Bomb was a 50 Mega Tonne atomic fusion device and is the largest device ever detonated. The Soviet Union in a show of strength to the Americans during the Cold war decided to demonstrate their intent with the device. It was so powerful that a person standing one hundred miles away would have received third degree burns. It flattened the region over which it was detonated. It's amazing how such a small device could yield such awesome power given that the bomb itself was about the size of a tractor, but great things often come in small bundles. So the scientists when analysing the fallout from the asteroid upon impact scaled up the Tsar Bomb by ten thousand times and even that was a conservative estimate, for the reality was it would be much greater. The computers responded with a model of the post-apocalyptic world in which the blue planet was turned upside down with turmoil. The asteroid would smash into the ocean first setting off hyper tsunamis as high as skyscrapers. These would hit the coasts of North America, South America, Europe and Africa. Asia was spared these waves of tyranny. It was predicted that the majority of the population of the world would survive this initial stage. But this stage was the calm before an almighty storm. The second stage involved huge chunks of rock and debris ejected into the atmosphere blocking out the sunlight and depriving man of the light he so dearly covets. The best estimates said that it would take three hours for the dirt and debris to fully immerse the atmosphere of Earth. Accompanying this would be violent storms and hurricanes that would cause massive destruction. Best estimates concluded that thirty percent of the population would perish in this stage.

The final stage was the one that would condemn man. Without sunlight and oxygen man slowly dies either through starvation or asphyxiation. 99.9% of species that were still alive were predicted to die in this stage. It became a joke among the sullen scientists that maybe, just maybe, one insect might survive the ordeal, but given the deprivation of conditions, such a situation was not comprehensible. Only bacteria and fungi and perhaps viruses would survive the nightmare. All men, all of his achievements, his failures, his love and his life would vanish as if men had never been around to observe the world in the first place. "Does the universe exist if man is not there to live in it?" That is the question that the men at NASA regularly asked themselves. Is there a world if no one can appreciate it? Despite the frantic efforts by leaders and the richest of the rich, it was too late to change the inevitable. Man had been so greedy in looking after his own ideals that the monster had grown and grown until it could no longer be tamed. It was too late to reverse the damage and those were the sentiments espoused by the top scientists at NASA and elsewhere.

Such was the speed the asteroid was travelling at, that firing a nuclear missile into it was like firing a fly at a Lamborghini racing down the highway. The writers at Hollywood attempted to use their creativity to come up with ideas ranging from landing people on the asteroid to altering the trajectory of the planet itself, both of which were impossible given the limitations of man at that time. The best they could achieve was just to prolong the fight. They decided to harvest commercial rockets that would send man into the depths of space and let those chosen few observe the carnage like the men who watch the dogs fight each other to the death. This fate was indicative of man on the whole for great change is often borne out of great tragedy. It had taken the potential annihilation of men to implore them to finally act, but it was all too late. They had reached and exceeded the singularity of choices and once you go past the singularity in life there is no return, no second chance. Those on Earth had a great choice to make. They could either choose death now or choose it later. They had never faced such a conjecture. Usually life was a question of whether to go to the cinema today or tomorrow? Or what should I eat today? It was never: Do you want to die today or tomorrow? The men and women were dazed when faced with such a terrifying choice. A lot committed suicide for they could not take the angst associated with the nihilistic viewpoint. The legions of men and women were woken up from their conditioned life of nine to five and enjoyment after work and the weekend. Now the true questions of life revealed themselves. What becomes of the individual when he dies? Is there another life? Is there a

God? Usually such questions were reserved for the terminally ill who were slowly dying and drenched in such existential absurdness to the point that it was unavoidable. Now it was the turn of the young and the enlivened to answer to this philosophical judge and jury and they were not found to be innocent. It was only when the sands of time were running thin that man dared look in the mirror and question his enthusiasm for life. They saw the finite nature of man. They learned that their lives were not about their relationships, friendships, work or even enjoyment. No instead they came to believe that there was no school of life, no right way to live and no wrong way either. Life was now like space in that it was the same in either direction regardless of what path you chose. No up or down existed in space time. Life on Earth before the imminent collapse gave meaning and the invisible arrow of morality was used on how best to navigate its choppy straits. Space offered no such thing. The criminals were held in the same regard as the geniuses. There was no heaven and no hell in this now defunct world. Space had no countries or ethnic groups. Everyone was the same as they were different. Men and women alike were considered equivalent and judged fairly. The rich were held in the same league as the poor; the smart as the foolish and the law-abiding citizens the same as the underworld.

With the asteroid came chaos. The economic system broke down. Love and work evaporated from the planet and anarchy took over. Money had no currency silhouetted against the gigantic eclipse of the dark energy. It was useless. Everything was rationed and traded. Those who had no money were as rich as those who had lots of money. The rich derided this concept. They had lost their wealth on Earth and it stung their senses like a needle prick. They wanted better and more. They wanted immortality and the chance of a better life in the beyond. No such thing existed. Martin Luther in the 16th century used this cheating to expose the Catholic church for what it was. These Indulgences enabled sinners to gain one foot in the eternal resting place of heaven through paying a generous fee to the powers-that-be in the religious circles. Luther took issue with this and rightly pointed out the falsifications of these payments.

Fast forward hundreds of years and the rich men whose time was coming to a foregone conclusion often were channelled in their desperation towards these religious money making schemes. The only difference was that the religious entrepreneurs too realized that they were doomed in the current situation. But there were some who did not get anxious with the apocalyptic forecast, for they believed that they were destined anyhow to wake up in a utopian world of bliss.

It begs the question that if we are guaranteed a certain life in the next world, why should one bother living at all in this one? That was one of the many questions to be avoided for it cut deep into the beliefs of the religious. The religious role-models asserted that man was the cancer and this was his punishment. Man had focussed on his own glory at the expense of the greater good. The planet had been abused like a dog that is beaten for simply being a dog. To enable economies to thrive, the nature and the beauty of the blue planet had become soiled. Global warming had depleted the lands and shorelines; the oil had run out and had not been replaced by another commodity; the pharmaceutical companies had eyed profits before integrity, in that they ignored the plight of African countries that were stricken with terrible viruses such as Ebola and West Nile Syndrome. The good men of religion be it Christianity or Islam used the spate of man's destruction to hammer home the resultant judgement. "God was not happy with man," they said and they got enjoyment out of seeing man suffer and revolt inwards at the looming speck of dust that was flying at such a fierce speed towards man's home.

This strain of thought mutated to become a fully-fledged religion in its own right, much to the chagrin of the Muslims and Christians. Just as new political parties form on anger and not enthusiasm, new religions are spawned out of the frustrations with the current models and the eagerness for a better one that will save the believers. It says so much about man that he is prepared to follow rather than to lead. He would much rather live in the delusion that something will work out, than look in the mirror and face the harrowing facts. Men are emotional and that is how the latest crop of deceitful religions took hold. The proprietors would exclaim that this new God would have the power to alter the course of the asteroid and that Catholicism or Islam had so far failed to achieve this. This new religion was precociously followed in the firm belief that man's superstitions would be vindicated. Those who did not get selected for the mission to space, watched on as the asteroid slowly made its way towards their vision and they died with the firm conviction that the planet would be saved. Of course, there were many men who repented their sins in the self-absorbed hope that this confession would manipulate the minds of the gods and that they would swoop down from the heavens and knock the asteroid out of its path. Man became desperate. It was only when he saw that his life was terminal that he began to feel guilty.

What became of the world on its final months? Some committed suicide along with their family in a sort of satanic ritual; some spent the remaining few hours in a drug induced coma, pushing the imminent nothingness into the back of their minds; some shut down into catatonic states of numbness; some went delirious and some just accepted their fate like the prisoner on death row who realizes that he has been dead for some time. The latter individuals were extremely rare it must be said. The majority of patrons of the blue planet fell into the first four categories of response. The laboratory of Earth became riddled with anxiety and of eternal emptiness. Most either took their own lives or drank themselves cold or used heroin to conquer the angst. The future suffering was unbearable to them. The stress of starvation, the lack of warmth and clean water and the potential riots that would break out were enough to intimidate the minds of the conventional to the point that self-destruction through the hangman's noose or chemicals became attractive. They were both the same thing really. To commit suicide was an escape from the realities that the asteroid would bring; to fall into the arms of alcohol or diacetylmorphine was also an escape from the pain that the rock had written all over it.

The catatonic state of numbness was rare among individuals but it did occur. In this case men and women just shut down. The thought of the horror to be unleashed caused them to switch off and become unresponsive. They entered an almost zombie state of idealization in which they could not move or even speak for that matter. It was an escape and one of many. Others went overtly mad. They became delusional and started prophesising about the return of God and the lord and a new beginning and the strange thing was that the people who were desperate for a friendly resolution started to believe what the mad were pontificating about. A man who is desperate will believe desperate things and the masses in their anxiety were sucked into the vortex of the deranged purely because they wanted hope. The millions of men believed what they wanted to believe. They listened to what they wanted to hear and only saw what they wanted to see and henceforth the fable of a new world in the aftermath of the strike from the asteroid was adopted as the new religion.

Then there was that rare individual upon whom wisdom shone a divine light, who accepted his fate for what it would become. Such a nihilistic individual was rare amongst the carnage in the last few hours of man's era. He did not come from the educated section of society, for they were as poor as the impoverished. Nor was he a pillar of society in that sense. No these individuals were rare.

They were not like other men and women. They were capable of critical thought and made decisions not on emotion but on logic and anyone who could rationalize the situation knew that life was on an egg timer. These individuals were the philosophers of society. They walked in the midst of the chaos seemingly unperturbed by it all. The riots, the deaths and the anger among mainstream society did not impinge on their consciousness. They were woven from the same cloth as the catatonic individuals but with more emotion included. They spent their last days enjoying existence before they surrendered to what the universe had prepared for them. It was honour and integrity in the same vein as the Japanese Samurai tradition. However, such individuals were lacking in the storm, but they had a calming influence on those that they encountered and they said it as it was. Death was a certainty as was the existential angst of nothingness and nothing man could do would change that fact. His prayers, his callings, his sacrifices, his admissions of guilt and his love could not halt the trajectory of the asteroid. One either accepted their destiny or they did not. They either woke up happy in the last remaining days or they woke up anxious and regardless of the state of their psyche, they were preordained to die anyhow. These philosophers tried to preach to those who were intent on committing suicide that it was a waste, because one was going to die anyhow. If it wasn't today, it was tomorrow or maybe next month, but they were going to die somewhere and sometime in the future. So in effect it was more logical to just prolong the inevitable until such time when the sky turned to fire.

The riots began in quietness. As the truth dawned on contemporary man that he was doomed, chaos broke out among the various sects of society. This was not a war of social class or racial class. No this was a riot based on all men who were all equal and who would all be treated the same by the asteroid. The government had pushed to try and keep calm but even they knew they were fighting a losing battle. The army was drafted in to maintain the order and they did a good job until they realized that spending their last few days, minutes and seconds serving a general they had never met would be foolish to say the least and they eventually saw enough of the asteroid to lay down their arms and return to spend time with their families and loved ones until the nightmare fully took hold. With the army out of the way, the lands turned into anarchy where the animal urges were released. Shops were rampaged as food supplies were stolen. Beer was in high demand for the people wanted to get drunk one final time before the end came. The proprietors of grocery stores had too given in to the chaos and vanished, although some were smart in that they transferred their

food products to a more secluded haven in the country and lived off the supplies for the time being. The people were angry and the riots were a product of this anger. They still clung to the hope that the threat could be averted and in turn they would threaten the governments and scientists if the situation was not changed. They thus marched on the offices of the parliaments and the huge corporations and demanded answers. Politicians were dragged out of their hives and castigated on the streets for their indifference. Some were beaten to a pulp by angry protesters who could not accept an early grave. It was chaos beyond what man had ever seen before. When the politicians were done, the scientists were next. The scientists would beg for mercy through deceit. They would say that they were developing a new kind of laser beam that could pulverise the asteroid and the mob believed them for a while and they let them move on with their work. But eventually they saw through the lies of the impetuous scientists and they were undone like the politicians. So the very people who could have perhaps given any hope to preventing the catastrophe were killed by the frustrated mob until the only minds left were the minds of the incompetent.

The angry people set up a new government or a new order that was intent on preaching the lies of the previous one whilst lying themselves about the future. So they reduced the scale of the catastrophe to more manageable parameters. Instead of a global wipe out, only a couple of thousand people in some remote corner far from America would lose their lives. Then the predicted global climate disintegration was downgraded to a very warm summer like a country may get in the equator in Central Africa and the people rejoiced and the number of deaths reduced dramatically with this single piece of news. But those who control the news make the news and it was like this with this derelict government of renegades who sought to hold power purely because they had nothing better to do with their remaining time on Earth. They knew in their hearts that their adjudicating was completely farfetched and not based on any credible intelligence. The strange thing about it was that the people bought into the lies. They had only two choices: Accept the law of the day or reject it and they wanted to hope that life was not hanging by a thread. People don't like being cynical and what they lose in such a methodology of thought they gain through the facetiousness of hope. The mob wanted to hope because hope gave them an emotional calmness they had not felt since first the news broke of this asteroid. This is what the temporary government instilled in the thoughts of the mob. They put hope and belief into their retinas and hence into their minds. But hope was like the asteroid. It was dangerous. It could endeavour to make man

accept. But when these predictions were not met he would turn violent and after a while the mob soon became tired with this new governments propaganda and the riots began again.

During the riots every day was a landscape of anarchy. People were shot in the middle of the street over supplies and left to die, for the hospitals were no longer functional. Buildings were doused in petrol and set on fire. Livelihoods that had taken years to formulate were burned to ashes in minutes. There were no laws in this new world. Some people were just frustrated and wanted an avenue to vent their inherent anger and took to shooting people at random with assault rifles. The gun was vital in this world. You could not walk through the streets with only your hands and intellect for you would be picked apart by the thugs who scavenged the paths in search of blood like the sharks in the sea. Little pockets of gangs began to form. It was better to find safety in the herd than to be cast into the sea alone. The groups then would target the individuals and kill and take their supplies, if they had any. Guns became the big thing in this derelict country of partisans. If you had guns and ammunition you could trade them in to get different guns and ammunition or perhaps food or medicine. The people wanted guns more than antibiotics and the only commodity that was in more demand than the guns was food.

What started as pure chaos began to settle into a pattern of stability. A city like Detroit for instance was dotted with numerous small gangs who were harmless and then there was three big gangs for whom the small gangs worked for. The Gangs then worked like any country that depends on economics to maintain its life. Those big gangs controlled the supply of all commodities: Food, drugs, medicine supplies, guns and alcohol were the important ones. Other smaller things were traded as well such as papers or DVDs that were used to pass the time. The Gangs then liaised with other gangs from different cities and they would trade in goods not cash. Cash became redundant for if someone wanted something of note they either traded or killed for it. Vehicles and oil were worth a lot. Oil was in such low supply given that the wells across the globe had ceased functioning. Little wells began to be operated by nomad's intent on using the oil to gain food or other supplies, but what these renegades were producing and what was demanded were two different things, hence why its value soared. A man who had oil or at least could get oil was paraded as a pharaoh. The oil could be used to heat the run down derelict buildings and it

also was used to drive the armoured vehicles in patrols around a certain gang's territory.

A status quo was thus reached by The Gangs. People lay dead and decomposing on the pavements, the blood flowing into the gutters when it rained. Those who did not abide by the code of violence instigated by The Gangs became drifters and either survived or succumbed to the murderous terror. Many moved away from the battles of the city and into the quietness of the countryside where they kept themselves busy with farms. Many people perished from the violence. Most died of starvation and sickness and very few people made it alone it must be said. Starvation was a cruel end to a life. The individual soldiered on for days at a time, the bones sticking through the skin, the coldness biting into their lips and their muscles slowly being consumed by their hunger. But what could be done? The meat industry had shut down or at most was at such a level that it could not supply the starving world. The whole grain farmers too had jumped ship. There was nine billion people and only enough food being generated for about one hundred million at best. Some survived through maintaining their own food supply like potatoes and carrots, but meat was a delicacy for the cattle and the various other farm animals too had disappeared along with the farmers.

Cannibalism became very common in this desperate world. Men have a habit of trying everything to stay alive and so when faced with the death they try to haggle their way out of their destiny and if that fails they turn to god and in the case of society when faced with starvation and death, they looked at other members of society and began to see them as viable food sources. This was in effect how The Gangs maintained their existence. They would ensnare wandering men and women and even children, lock them up and then when the time came, they were led out to be executed and eaten. Some were eaten in front of their loved ones such was the cruelty of The Gangs. Eventually though The Gangs were wasting too much bullets on the executions that a new method was needed to euthanize the food supply of fellow men and women. So they would drag the victim out tied up and take a blade and slit the throat and this method proved more economical and some in the spirit of boredom took to bashing in the head of the unlucky person until the individual died. Some were hanged, some were set on fire alive to cook the meat, some were electrocuted, some were skinned whilst breathing in a barbaric practice in which The Gangs would trade goods just to see such a horrific abuse and some were drowned. In some cruel cases The Gangs would take a father and make him kill his own children

or wife. They would threaten to rape, butcher and dismember his family in front of him unless he stabbed them himself. Most fathers killed their families purely because they were choosing the less painful method.

But it was either kill or be killed in this lawless dungeon. Those who were smart avoided the broken streets and highways of cities and took up home in the deserted countryside. The tundra of Alaska and Canada became a popular destination. Such was its coldness and bleakness that The Gangs of the cities rarely dared to embark on a journey too far north. This gave the survivors, the ones who would rather fight to live, a chance to see out the remainder of their existence hassle free, although The Gangs were known to surprise unsuspecting gatherers on occasion. What north of North America afforded people was balanced with the cold and frigid landscape. Many made the move propelled by the seduction of a new life; but instead froze to death on the glaciers because they had wholly underestimated the brutality of such bitter cold. Those who did make it built huts out of basic materials and chopped wood to make fires to stay warm.

So the continent that used be North America was divided into two. The cities held the most violent of men, whilst the desolate countryside's held the law-abiding citizens. But very few survived in either scenario. If you lived in the cities, perhaps in a broken-down skyscraper you ran the risk of a guerrilla style attack. But if you lived in the peaceful countryside you were threatened with malnourishment. Those who lived in the city often tried to escape into the other frontier, suckled on the hope that it was a far easier life, when in fact they would have lived longer in the war zone of the metropolitan area. Often those in the country ventured into the city to trade goods and never returned. They were attacked and killed in double crossing manoeuvres. It really was chaos no matter how you looked at it and from whatever angle you looked at it. Likewise, whether you were in the city or the country, the situation was dire at best. Survival was calculated for hours, not days or weeks or months. The anxiety levels were pumped to the brim for each second became a death struggle between prey and predator. People would turn on each other when the grim reaper was critiquing the landscape.

It was funny how the mentally ill who would have been considered fragments of general society prior to the imminent apocalypse were the very ones who mastered the ravaged landscape and combatant nature. The schizophrenics found a new life in this silent war of man versus nature. Before the collapse of

law and order, they were in straitjackets in hospitals where the doctors administered drugs and dictated their lives and how they lived. Now the roles had reversed. The doctors were estranged and if they weren't doing that, they were going mad themselves with the anxiety. The schizophrenics and those on that spectrum of disorders discovered a release in this anarchy. They were able to roam the countryside with no dissenting voices telling them to do this and do that. They could twist the roots of conformity to their own liking. They were the one band of society that grew into the rough conditions. They could maintain morale without food and heat. The frost did not bite into their consciousness like it did the normal folk. Something about the ragged conditions seemed to light a spark in their soul. Whereas the original life was all about bills and relationships, this new life was simple: Survive for as long as you can and they relished such a challenge. They could take the abnormality better than the normal man for some reason. It was as if their minds were anti-conformity and pro-chaos. The squalid and dirt of the streets provoked a warmth in their hearts. They did not mind moving from place to place and being devoid of sensible food or good clothes. They loved this life and wished it would continue. They were ridiculed for their positivity however. The normal folk couldn't understand how they were so positive under the weight of the oncoming implosion.

There were no criminals as such in this new order. Those who had committed crimes in the previous world had their sentences and labels revoked. The good folk merged with the purveyors of crime and they forgot about the labels that had originally been laid on such men. For what could they do? They were doomed either way. The asteroid was heading towards the planet; their livelihoods had been destroyed by the riots and they had little or nothing to be emotional about. Thus, the criminals were forgiven for their mistakes and allowed to re-join society. There were some ordinary folk who put up a fight and wanted to segregate the different from the similar like old times, but even the purest of men saw that it was redundant. One only gets a pardon when one is close to death and this was the case with the guilty. For some strange reason, the criminals like the schizophrenics had a huge incentive to live despite the ensuing chaos that was certain. It was as if they simply should live and enjoy the last few months because that is all one can do. The law abiding impassioned class did not respond in this manner though. They became anxious and remorseful at the predicted outcome. The criminals though would laugh and

cheer and be happy at their freedom and they would abuse drugs and so on and all the while the future destruction could not encroach on their ego.

Back in the real world where work and relationships prevailed, this was the weakness of the criminals for they lived on ideas and a lack of insight into the negatives of their actions and yet the same mentality was lauded with the worlds curtains drawing to a close. In this world it was the conventional folk who were criminal in that they could not tolerate such a world of uncertainty. Some criminals formed their gangs in cities and terrorised the country folk. "Once dodgy; always dodgy," was the motto and they enjoyed the reversal of fortunes in that they now controlled the environment instead of the government or the good-natured public. But isn't it strange how the two types of people adapted to the reality of a crippled republic. The ordinary folk could not tolerate the burning Earth and caved in psychologically. The criminals and the schizophrenics both grew into the thinning sands of time and almost revelled in the state of utter chaos.

Now some criminals became part of the groups further north and worked for them farming and also provided protection for them from The Gangs and they were embraced without prior knowledge of their crimes. Ignorance is bliss when it comes to the past and this was the case with the criminals who were taken under the wing of the farm folk of the countryside. What crimes and misdemeanours were previously hanging over an individual's head were suddenly forgotten with the coming of the apocalypse and this system seemed to fare well with the farmers and criminals alike. One reason for this was that money now was useless and thus robbing people to earn cash was deemed futile and even the most unintelligent of petty criminals knew this fact. They could only try to hold out for as long as possible and try to enjoy the remainder of their lives like the farmer gatherers did. Did they feel remorse for their crimes? Some did and some didn't and that was true before the future disaster was known. Some had repented and saw this new freedom as a chance to make amends and therefore took to the hard labour of the farming and the dangerous job of fending off The Gangs from the south. It became a chance at redemption, even with the wilting starlight. Others lacked remorse altogether, even for the most gross injustices of mankind. But they were programmed this way from childhood and to ask them to acknowledge guilt, particularly when it was irrelevant to do so as their freedom did not depend on it, was stupidity at best.

Very often these types frequented the violent gangs of the city and some took command of the partisans and instigated a reign of supreme hardship upon the innocent and free peoples of the quiet north. The sudden loss of law and motivation to live and maintain society brought about the best and worst in man, as war generally does. Some men displayed bravery that was rare. Some men took to assaults and anti-social behaviour to vent their frustrations. Most men became passive and found comfort in the herd. Most men belonged to a group or herd it can be assumed. Very few men had the ability and toughness to go their own way and shape their own future. Instead they allowed others to dictate the direction they should take. So if the group moved west, the individual followed like a lamb to the slaughter and seldom did people think clearly and concisely about their decisions. Life in some ways was no different than when it was normal. The people still craved order and direction. They wanted to follow rather than lead. They wanted to be hunted rather than to hunt.

But given the desolation of the plains, it was often those who went their own path, who carved out a nice hut in a secluded part of the countryside, hidden from the deceitful eyes of The Gangs that survived the longest. This loner would graze on vegetables and corn. Meat was rarely on the menu unless a hunt was on the cards, but the hunt ran the risk of exposing the position of this lonely dweller and therefore was only partaken on necessary occasions. These loners were dotted across the lands of North America, but because the lands were so great and extended so far, finding a loner was next to impossible. Some loners even took to the trees or caves to stay out of sight. To be visible ran the risk of a deadly end. The mood of the country was one of hostility and people who ordinarily could be trusted back when the economies were fully functioning could not be trusted now. People would as soon kill you as they would smile at you. Thus, the loners of this new order avoided everyone and minimized the stress on their lives. If one was skilled in the art of survival outdoors, then one could survive. If you had your wits about you and played your cards right, it was possible to live on bare subsistence. One could grow vegetables, drink water and set traps to ensnare the wild animals. But one had to be so careful in this anarchic existence. Gatherers usually looked out for the signs of loners as did The Gangs. Now the gatherers would only hunt you from your home, but The Gangs would kill you or possibly encage you and cannibalize you later for food. The anxiety of being alone was intense. This life rewarded those who managed to keep their identity hidden in that they survived and lived to stare at

the stars for one more night. But should you be caught the ending was not good and that threat left many loners on the edge.

The loners prided themselves on blending into the surroundings. Many were dressed in forest attire and had dark paint embroidered on their face to match the flora and fauna of the forests. Very often when gangs marched through the forest, the loners could lie in their camouflage on the forest floor and simply watch The Gangs move about without being detected. They were skilled in the art of deception. They knew how to conceal themselves. One loner for instance saw how The Gangs when hungry turned on one of their own, a weak man who had injured his leg. The members of the gang surrounded him and tied him to a post and then set him on fire alive and ate him when he was cooked. The screams and moans were just shocking and the loner did well not to reveal his position.

Whereas most people needed the comfort of conversation, the loners could survive without such interaction for sustained periods. Some said it was the schizophrenic nature of their psyche, that they had entered a zone of isolation and lived on the fringe of being. This psychological strength served them well in the countryside where in order to maintain survival one would need to avoid being known. But for some such lengths without human contact, yet alone human touch, could drive them to the brink of collapse. They would fall into the arms of depression and slumber on until they decided they had seen enough of this pure carnage to continue.

The country was peaceful and tranquil at times. The gatherers would rear the cows and milk them or slaughter the calves to feed themselves but even they knew that they were living on thin ice. But then the cows were stolen or killed in a fit of jealousy because other gatherers saw how one set of gatherers were prospering and felt the need to make things even. But despite this harassment it was mainly quiet in the countryside. It was dull but very cold and that was the price you paid for such hospitality.

Life in the cities was totally different. As they were populated with gangs they had turned into swamps of violence in which those who were in The Gangs were always fighting other gangs for territory. That being said, people did live in the city, they just lived in the murky shadows and rarely revealed themselves. A city like New York for instance was filled with these passive rebels who formed pseudo groups of their own to increase the odds of survival. Some rebels

however did manage to go alone in the city but the first-hand accounts of these types were few and far between for they simply stayed away from trouble. Some said that among these loners were the schizophrenics of the north who had migrated in the winter to the warmer areas and they were probably right for the winters further north could be extremely cold.

There were plenty of hideouts. Although the buildings were now derelict and empty and the electricity was not running because the power plants had exhausted their fuel, be it carbon or nuclear based, it was possible to take up residence in these slums. Life was hard without the power and electricity. The now homeless had gone from a life blessed with technology to one where they still had the technology but without a power supply. The phone lines were intact, running from house to house and building to building but they were dead. With the events of the world, countries and cities just shut down and were no longer trading. The more you depend on something the more dangerous it is, for if that dependence is exposed you will suffer. Of all the changes this was the one that struck hardest on the remainder of the people who were prepared to sit out the apocalypse. They still had food, though basic and they still had shelter without heat, but they no longer had their tablet or smart phone which dictated their previous life. Some speculated that man in his greed had spent far too much money on commodities he didn't need and far too little investment on what could save him.

The best they had was hope, the hope that they would live to hope in the future. This is what The Rebels and The Gangs possessed. They saw that they could do nothing and so just left life to its own devices and carried on trying to live for as long as they could. The Rebels were the same as The Gangs, but without the violence. They were both in an all-out war of survival. They were like two dogs pitted against each other in the underworld. But whereas The Gangs would kill on the spot and indulge in the dark arts of torture, The Rebels were much kinder in spirit. Violence was only carried out when The Gangs invaded, which they did on a daily basis. Even with the world coming to a grave end man could not help but yield to the bravado within him. Like all sects in society, they are borne out of segregation. One group prejudices another group and so on and then the prejudiced group must flock together like the herd of bison on the plains and try to counter the dealings of the initial group. This was the case of The Rebels even though they did not realize it. The Gangs would drive their armoured vehicles through the streets firing rounds from their assault rifles at any unlucky

or stranded individuals, or worse they may take them and use them as bait for entertainment. Sometimes they were tortured purely for fun. The Gangs would love to just look into the eyes of someone who was skinned alive and barely breathing. Sometimes they pitted a man against a pack of highly brutal dogs and let them tear him apart. Often, they would fight man versus man until one was totally battered. There were reports that a young woman was cooked alive inside a furnace, set at just the right temperature that she would suffer for days from dehydration and heat.

But the thirst for blood was The Gangs undoing for when The Rebels got together and decided to launch a counter offensive, The Gangs lost heavily in artillery and man power, but unlike their bloody foes, The Rebels did not torture any prisoners in this street war. Instead they shot them on the spot for it was one less man to feed and more importantly to worry about. Whilst initially The Gangs held the upper hand, that balance gradually began to shift when The Rebels stock piled on guns and ammunition. Unlike other commodities, guns were in plentiful supply. There were handguns, shot guns, machine guns and assault rifles used in this guerrilla war. The Rebels managed to score a big plus when they discovered a crate of sniper rifles in an abandoned warehouse in a suburb of Detroit. They were now able to pick their targets off from a distance instead of the danger of having to get close to the enemy. Many a gang member was taken out using these precision engineered rifles. The Rebels even had in their ranks a highly-trained marine whose speciality was the sniper rifle.

The Rebels found that passively waiting for change brought about none and this is what endeavoured to bring them into the war. Expecting to reason with the monsters was imprudent for these gangs were hell bent on pain, blood and death. Casually accepting your death as if they The Gangs would alter their convictions usually led to one's demise. The only way was to fight back with the same brutality that The Gangs themselves used. There initially had been rebels who when rounded up, just casually walked to the guillotine like the lambs who were indifferent to their fate. For some reason there was no fight in them. There was no eagerness to live or remain alive. They were like dogs who were content with a cruel master's punishment because they are the slave and he is the boss. Some of these rebels needed to be tougher. They were too weak. They let the world slip by and did nothing. I suppose this attitude was indicative of man on the whole, for he had let a prosperous planet fall into the clutches of darkness. Thus, The Rebels grouped together and instilled a mental and physical

toughness into their lives. Those who were weak were given other jobs such as scouting the position of gangs. Those who were smart laid the plans for the strategic attacks on the enemy. Those who were strong and fearless were led into battle and took out The Gangs without remorse. It was either kill or be killed in this world and an eye for an eye is the best policy in war.

It was only when The Rebels had taken a gang stronghold in the centre of Detroit that the horror of horrors was discovered. Although it was suspected but not proven until the gang territory was taken, a death camp had been set up. In this camp prisoners lived in such squalid conditions. Many were starving and skinny from lack of food. Some had been tortured daily in various ways. Some were experimented on to try and create a race of man that would survive the meteor holocaust. It was a sickening sight that The Rebels had uncovered and further proof of man's apathy to the greater population. Even with Earth's rope wearing thin man had the capacity and foulness to only think in terms of his vanity. The camps were set up to try and harness a human that could be capable of surviving the fires and rivers of lava that would engulf the planet. Such an idea was idiotic at best and totally lacked plausibility. But none the less The Gangs decided to embark on a study of man. Although The Rebels had proof that such and such camps existed with totalitarian regimes implementing them, they lacked that visual proof of the horrors and thus could only speak on hearsay. Nothing is in life unless you witness it. The camps existed in the forest of man's mind and the many trees hid it from the curious eyes of The Rebels. But there were murmurings particularly from gang members who when afflicted with the torment and catastrophe of the gang's credo, deflected to The Rebels or perhaps to the solitude. From them came first-hand accounts of the genocide because the camps were rarely discussed by members of The Gangs and it was only those who were previously stationed in the camps that saw the monstrosities. The camps were secret and their operation was denied and ridiculed by the top brass of The Gangs for fear that the foot soldiers would themselves form a mutiny on the wave of such barbaric and inhumane treatment of man. Doctors who were captured, particularly those who were knowledgeable on the human chromosome and DNA were held under duress and instructed to test on man to produce a recombinant DNA model that could survive the intense conditions that man would be exposed to. The idea was to create a man that could tolerate minute quantities of oxygen; one that could survive in both extremes of hot and cold and one that was not dependent on food for survival. This was the blue print of the super-man they wished to

create: A man that was a God and not weak like those they saw before them. But these dreams were the stuff of madness. The conscripted doctors knew that they lacked both the facilities, technology and most importantly the time to bring the plans to life and confessed that such demands could only be achieved in two or maybe three hundred years of study. But alas they went to work anyhow and although initially they recoiled with such disgust at what they would do to their fellow man, gradually they became conditioned to the suffering and accepted it as normality. Man can become habituated to anything it is said and this was true of the scientists. They went from revolt to almost sadism with what they had to do and how they did it. The eyes of victims were injected with chemicals, the limbs hacked off and experimented upon and new substances were force fed into the chosen guinea pigs who had no choice but to accept such horrific experimentation. Their painful suffering was heard nightly. They would scream and call and whisper in the shadows, yearning to be free and no one would answer to their calls and that was the saddest thing of all. "Where was god or where was the compassionate man who could end such suffering and why were they so ignorant?"

There were two types of evil in this world: Those who committed evil and those who casually watched it being committed and did nothing to alleviate the pain. Both were guilty of such terrible crimes. Upon finding the first camp, some rebels were so taken aback with the horror and the conditions that they retreated into themselves for a time and tried to negate what they had observed. Others felt so guilty about letting such cruelty happen. Others still wondered how man was capable of such inhumane suffering. Man is man and what he does is unpredictable in the best of worlds and in the worst of worlds. Those gangs who survived the initial onslaught of The Rebels were executed on the spot not because they were on the other side but because they had been culpable in such atrocities. Some of those who were executed begged for a second chance and some were so resolute that they did not even blink an eye as the firing squad aimed to fire. It became obvious how the camps operated. Men and women were held in cages of steel measuring about 10 foot by 5 foot by 3 foot. They were held lying down and could not move about. They were drip fed water and food was placed in their cage to eat. The smart refused to eat and be used like rats and thus simply starved themselves. But the foolish ate the food and continued their painful existence. As The Rebels delved more into this frightful abyss they stumbled upon more horrors. The Gangs were extracting bile from tied down humans without proper medical instruments or even sedation for that

matter. The human subject was tied to a table and needles were injected into its abdomen and the bile was tapped and extracted. One could only imagine the pain that the human was in as this process was carried out. Then other humans were tested in all sorts of extreme methods. Some had their eyes removed. Some were deprived of sleep for long periods and the resulting madness was chronicled or perhaps used as amusement for the gang leaders. Those who were suffering sleep deprivation were in a terrible state of delusion and lack of awareness and they begged for mercy and a bullet to the head. The camp was enormous and was based in a rundown sky scraper building in Detroit. Different floors were home to different groups of men and women.

But a camp is a camp nonetheless and it was to be avoided so much that those unlucky humans who were caught by The Gangs often killed themselves to avoid being taken prisoner. The Gang's mentality was delusional at best. They were fully convinced that a better and more sturdy human could be engineered, one that could survive the extreme conditions that the asteroid would bring. Some gang members refused to even acknowledge the star in the sky and the curvature of the Earth. "There was no asteroid," they would say as they continued living regardless. This was one of the more harrowing reasons why the camp was enacted for it served as a form of entertainment for The Gangs. It was used as a theatre of death so that The Gangs could be entertained and avoid the boredom. With the chaos on Earth, all the channels of entertainment had vanished in the space of a month. There were no more sports teams, newspapers, music or television for man to conduct his intolerance of boredom into. Everything had disappeared so rapidly that the gang members became so bored with themselves that the only form of entertainment viable was to torture fellow man. The camps and their pain arose from man's inability to just sit and accept his boredom. The Rebels themselves derived pleasure from attacking the gang's territory and freeing human subjects but even they grew frustrated with the lack of things to do to pass the time. Some of them drank themselves into a euphoric stupor, some hunted deer or bison and some of them, albeit very rare, could just sit and enjoy the serenity of their final days on Earth. With the disappearance of law and order, new methods of entertainment were discovered.

There were no countries anymore. The lines had been removed. America was no longer America. Russia was no longer Russia. The invisible ribbons that separated countries prior to the incoming destruction were now cut. People no longer referred to themselves as Americans or Canadians. No, they were just

people now who were struggling to survive the harsh conditions that life had presented. The desire to be better had disappeared. The capitalist agenda of being superior to your neighbour had vanished when the asteroid became visible in the night sky. It was no longer about being the best on offer as the streets of Wall Street had instructed, for those streets were now empty and trashed. Now it was just about survival of the smartest. There was no money to be earned or gain to be sought. The American Dream was dead and replaced with the American Reality.

With the disappearance of the countries came the disappearance of economies. People could only trade with those who were in close proximity to them. With the rail lines broken and the shipping lanes defunct, The Rebels could only but harvest some commodity in their native land and then exchange that good for another. Money had no currency in this savage world. People had to accept that the normal life of buying or rewarding oneself for a hard week's work had now vanished. It was a game of survival now. Their worries were no longer relationships and love. Now their anxieties lay in hunger, shelter and protection from the predators. The life of man became a clear reality. He was not the son of god or a privileged species. He was an animal like all other animals, an animal that through the ability to reason had placed himself above all others. But now he was no better than the pigs in the abattoir. The over reliance on technology had come back to bite them. Without the electricity and oil man was reduced to using his bare arms to dig for commodities. There was no heating, no cars, no television, no health care and no ships. Man had become too dependent on technology that when it was taken from him he was reduced to a shadow of a man. Everything grounded to a dead halt. Planes could not fly, trucks could not move and lay abandoned on the motorways. The factories stopped working, the shops shut down and the pubs closed. Life if viewed from space prior to the chaos was littered with spots of bright lights and energy. Now it was as dark as the dark side of the moon.

Marriage was no longer viable and neither was love. It was every man for himself much like the animal kingdom. Relationships were dead. People stayed together or came to agreements about how to best survive in this strange world but the love that had dominated the scene prior to the fall was non-existent. Marriage was a product of the good times it must be said and now it was time to survive and not fall in love. The romantic life seemed to dissipate in a week as the carnage rolled in and people began to see how much pretence was involved

in relationships on the whole. When the world was round and turning on its axis without stiffness, love was the order of the day. One would have thought that if love was what it said it was, that it would have survived the coldness and the pain. One would have thought that love conquered all armies. But it turns out that what was called love was just a false economy that melted in the harsh conditions. Men and women who previously were a couple now fought and just went their separate ways. The richest of the rich in particular bore the brunt of this failure of sorts in the love game. The wives couldn't tolerate the sudden apocalyptic loss of order and demanded the husband do something to alleviate the problem. The husband, used to achieving his wife's wishes through a gold necklace or some other lavish commodity, was left stuck and powerless. This scenario would then repeat itself with more unsolved problems and gradually the two people in the union would break apart. They couldn't take the sudden shift from a good life to a totally opposite life of struggling to survive. In particular, they could not take to being treated like stray dogs who must slave and fight for every scrap of food available.

But with the absence of law and order came much hardship. Rape was rampant among The Gangs. The Rebels had managed to instil law into their ideology and thus kept the sinister urges at a minimum. But The Gangs were lawless and ruthless. They would round up women to be used as slaves. Many were raped repeatedly and treated in such horrible fashion. The Gangs were cruel. They saw the women as commodities to be used for sexual gratification. They would exchange women for other goods also. Women got swapped for oil or food. Sometimes The Rebels would trade with them to rescue some women from the grasp of The Gangs. But that was rare for The Rebels did not enjoy dealing with The Gangs. One would think that man would in his final months, days or hours be more courteous and less engrossed in the demands of life. But even with hell firing towards Earth, man still lived on his urges and sexual gratification was one of those urges.

Within The Rebels, some groups consisted mainly of women that had come to despise the gang's treatment of women. Thus, they launched attacks on their territory to free the enslaved women. These women came to resent men and blamed them for the current situation. "Man creates problems for which he does not have solutions," they would say. This radical wave of women deplored the life of servitude that women had to face in this new arrangement. The rebel groups that consisted of women thus tried to free the shackled women. This

rebel group fell out with the males in The Rebels. They were too fanatical in what they wished to achieve which was a world without men and when the asteroid hit they would be granted that wish. They looked after themselves and tried to encourage other women to join their group and together they would free any woman or child in chains.

There was one other group that existed. This was a group of scientists who worked in secret. They lived in an isolated area in The Mojave Desert and worked out of sight underneath the sand dunes. Their goal was to ensure the survival of man and they worked tirelessly to bring that cause to reality. The group consisted of nearly two thousand men and women who operated in pure secret. They were divided into groups in the complex. There were scientists who worked on the biochemistry and physics, there were engineers who were building the rockets and there were the operatives who supplied materials and food. The whole operation was nuclear powered and did not depend on external electricity to sustain itself. The system seemed to work very well and with the world on the brink of nihilistic oblivion it actually became easier to work for there was no politics involved and the materials were in plentiful supply.

The Rebels had heard of such a place but had never gained conclusive proof that it existed. The Gangs did not even care that it existed. It was well hidden in the dry desert of the Mojave. Getting into the group was next to impossible. The Company as they became known, would shoot on the spot any homeless people or loiterers. Part of the success of The Company lay in their anonymity. They worked tirelessly to fabricate a means for man to survive. Initially they worked on a method of destroying the asteroid before it could hit but such method was tried, tested and rendered useless by even the most emotional of scientists. The next plan was to send man into space followed by emigration to another planet that was the same as Earth in stature and chemistry. But these planets were light years away and getting to them would be a serious problem. The physicists were tasked with finding a short cut or a wormhole that would bridge the gap between the space ship and the determined planet. A wormhole is a region of space that acts as a short cut through space. It connects two regions in space that would otherwise be infinitesimal distances apart. It acts as a short cut between two regions. In a breakthrough of physics, several wormholes had been discovered in the solar system before the coming of the asteroid, each which led to a different part of the universe. It was the mathematics of general relativity that predicted their existence. The physicists thus started engineering rockets

that would be sent through these holes with the hope that they would stumble upon an Earth-like planet that could save mankind. But it is not enough to find something in life, for you must try to understand it as well and there was no point in sending man through a wormhole if he was going to be sucked into a frenzied abyss. As a result they would work diligently to try and comprehend the mechanics of the wormholes.

The engineers then worked on their side of the equation. They built simple rockets that would send man into orbit and then when in orbit they built the mother ships that would enable man to continue to survive. Magnificent ships were designed and constructed in space that were capable of sustaining man for a period of seven to eighteen months depending on the food and oxygen supplies. The ships were mammoths of engineering. They were the size of hotels, equipped with bed dorms, a gym, toilet facilities, a control room and much more. They were so big that they had to be manufactured in space for no amount of fuel could have enabled them to be launched from Earth into orbit. Thousands of men were sent into the darkness to work on the ships. They were strapped up in their space suits and began binding and welding the ships into reality. It was an awesome feat of space engineering that man undertook. Lives would be lost given that the project was hurried and no space engineer was under the illusion that it was not risky. For instance, on one occasion a space worker drifted into the infinite. His harness broke and he just wandered away into the darkness. His colleagues just watched him slowly disappear into the vastness that was the universe. He waved and thanked god and prayed that he would meet his wife and children in the new world. A number of ships were built to accommodate man in one last leap of desperation to save the human race. The ships together with the work force took between seven and eight months to build. On Earth given the infrastructure involved, a ship would have been completed in two months. But men had to be launched into space and they had to be fed. There was no money involved for this job. It was advertised as the last hurdle for mankind and men flocked at the gates of the unknown to try and preserve the final remnants of human beings.

Yet the masses of men still had an air of confidence about them. They still clutched onto the belief of eternal life in this world or the next. Consequently, there was a rush of people to sign up for the transportation to the ships in question when they were finished. Men were fully convinced that a new land could be found. Men believe only what they want to believe and in this case a

new blue planet was the order of the day. So many hundreds were chosen purely by chance and sent into orbit. Some came from The Gangs, some came from The Rebels and some were just the loners. They had come from all four corners of North America and beyond for the last quest of mankind and some even trekked from the continents outside of the Americas. Some had to leave behind friends and family knowing that it would be the last time they would see each other unless the teachings of the divine were true. They made the journey to the centre of the experimental lab in the Mojave Desert and were checked and tested for any abnormalities in their blood and body, for it was vital that healthy people be sent into space. Children were not chosen for the launch. They were considered too young and feeble for such a journey. It was only the fittest of the fit who were selected to venture into the skies. Older men and women were rejected because it was felt they possessed inadequate health or lacked the mental toughness for the change among other things.

The chosen were then prepped for the rigorous flight. They had to undergo submerged water training to prepare them for the lack of gravity. They had to learn how to live in an enclosed area without the beauty of the sun to see. They were then rocket powered into space and the rocket then aligned with the chosen mother ship. The chosen ship was then thrust in any which direction, in the hope that a new planet like Earth would be found in any which place. Some were sent to Mars; some were sent to colonize the moon and some were sent through the many wormholes.

The ships had a captain. The remaining people were part of the chosen ones. They knew upon leaving Earth that it was game over and that the blue planet would be no more. They knew they were facing a high possibility of death and could but only enjoy the remaining time they had alive and they became acclimatised to the stresses of life in space. Initially it was hard and the change was so strange. To go from the freedom of Earth where one could go for a nice stroll down by a lake or dance in the rain, to being caged in an enclosure the size of a hotel with no sunsets or other wonderful scenery. The lack of gravity was the most idiosyncratic of qualities. On Earth one was stuck to the ground; in space one floated around or at least did so initially until the rockets blasted off into the unknown universe. They left planet Earth, in search of a new frontier. In total eighty-six ships departed the sun kissed shores of Earth and sought a new life, whatever were the chances of that.

When the asteroid finally hit, some of the ships were still in the solar system and a satellite positioned on Earth was able to relay the deferred pictures of a now gigantic killing field. They watched on in horror at the burning and the choking of the planet. The blue Earth had now transformed into a sea of red dust. Eventually the Earth's atmosphere was covered in debris and the satellite could no longer see into the destruction. They watched and watched from big screens and cried and shed tears for loved ones who were probably dead. They then picked themselves up and tried to come to terms with their own mortality. They would only survive at best a couple of more months before the oxygen or the food ran dry. How they longed for redemption but it was not forthcoming. They gradually accepted the situation for what it was or at least some of them did and tried to remember the good things of life.

The people on the ships wanted order. They wanted the certainty of laws. In space they got no such leverage. It didn't matter if they went north or south, if they believed in X or Y, there were no rules. There was no correct path on which to tread. Each man created his own rules. Each man was as right about the law as he was wrong. In space one's interpretation was held as correct whilst on Earth it was the interpretation of the majority that counted. But given that there was only a select group of perhaps four people on a ship, there was no majority. The criminals were geniuses and the geniuses were homeless men. No one was held in high regard; there was no laws. Everyone was a god as much as they were a devil. The men and women were like the stars in that they all looked the same from a distance. The people may have had different names and faces, but from a distance they all looked identical. They all radiated the same light, they were all spherical and they were all finite. This was one of the most hurting truths that befell the members of the ships. They gradually began to see that they were not so special. They had lived their lives under the illusion that they would live forever and now in the final moments of their race they could not tolerate that they would end in nothing. They could not bear the fact that they were identical to everyone else.

Man was reduced to staring out the ten-inch-thick glass planes at the distant stars that shone dimly. Now he was reduced to self-analysis of his life and had no furnace into which he could channel his energy. Now man had become introspective and if you stare for too long into the mirror, one starts to question what they see. Gazing into the realms of the universe they finally saw the truth. There were two ways to escape from the reality that this predicament threw at

them. One was to escape into life itself but that was now out of the question for where once there were blue skies now there was a never ending darkness on each horizon. The second method of escaping was to escape from within. When all other escapes were exhausted this was the final means of avoiding oneself and boredom. It involved madness and it became much more common in the ships per person than it was in the real world.

It started out quietly it must be said. A thought about eternal emptiness would turn into an obsession and this obsession about the death that awaited one would turn into a rumination of sorts. Eventually the individual's mind was gripped with anxiety. The themes of anxiety centred around the loss of loved ones, the thoughts that they would never see them again and the destruction of one's life for all of time. The madness then crept in as the hallucinations began and paranoia began to boil over. One must remember that the anxiety was a response to life itself and the madness was a response to the anxiety. The madness was the last escape and if that failed so would man. Of course the darkness did not help. Many could not take the endless blackness that the universe presented and they wanted a return to the sunny mornings that life was famous for. They missed the rising of the sun, the blue sky, the clear nights with the moon shining and the crisp air. Days did not exist in this icy heaven and thus man's biological clock was tampered with and some could not adjust. Some then began to feel guilt for leaving behind their partners and children and craved a return to the flamed planet.

This coupled with remorse for what they had done in life and the potential trip to purgatory made them even more anxious. Either way they were doomed. It was either a trip to nothingness or a trip to a domineering God who did not forgive lightly. The situation would become unbearable for some and they would casually commit suicide on the ships. Death became the only escape and it was an escape like any other, just not a pleasant one. But there were some who grew into the certainty of death. Some began to accept their cold fate and eased into the existential angst that accompanied it. These people were rare. These were the people who had quantified the insignificance of one's life in comparison to the world in its entirety. "What does one man, one life constitute?" they would ask incandescently whilst the Earth lay burning before their eyes. They were cold. Perhaps they were just immune to emotion or dead within, for the cries of fellow man did not echo in their conscience. They were the ghosts of the abyss. They were the men who were already dead and just

awaited the confirmation. They almost yearned for the death for it would release them from the grasp of the true suffering which was life itself.

They were rare though. Most people on the ship were strangled by their own thoughts. Loved ones were gone and the future was malignant. They couldn't but help fall into a crevasse of anxiety from which there was no way out. They could only internally implode to escape and many did and upon escaping they fell into the infinite of nothingness. They cried for God and prayed for a swift return. But God could not change the destiny nor could the scientists. Only the individual could manipulate the truth and some did. Some were convinced that there was no asteroid and this was all a great conspiracy or perhaps an experiment to see how man would fare in space. They became convinced out of necessity for their own wellbeing that Earth was actually fine and that they had been duped into travelling to space. These people had to be restrained often, for they threatened the sustainability of the ship. They would make threats that if the ship did not turn around and return to the homeland, they would bring the whole system down. Other members tried convincing them that they were delusional and that Earth really was a sea of destruction but a man who is delusional can rarely be cured of his delusion.

So the group acclimatised to their new home and woke each morning to darkness and the hope that this ship would steer them on a voyage to preserving the fate of mankind. They only had enough rations for maybe eighteen months and enough oxygen for roughly that length of time also. Therefore, they had to somehow find a new land. But it was known in private circles that these trips were more a shot to nothing. At best they could just be happy with what they had. Earth lay besieged in fires and they were safe for the time being. But nothing lasts forever; everything changes, even change itself.

Tears in Rain: The Bar

They twisted and turned as they beat each other outside The Black Swan pub; the rain danced off their bruised faces and drenched their ragged and worn clothes. The night was young and so were their lives. They had the future ahead of them and nothing could tell them otherwise. The bends and bumps that lay beyond did not register yet. It has been said that the youth are fully convinced that they will live forever and that was true in the case of these two men who were boxing each other like gladiators of the citadel.

Brian was more confident and better built. He walked like he talked, which was with an air of superiority and a feeling that he was better than the person he met. He was convinced that the world was destined to enable him to achieve. He had dark hair and a chiselled face and was built like a tank. He wanted to be known as a star or a genius or at least intelligent. He craved the respect that fame brought, the invitations to drug fuelled parties and the attention that members of the opposite sex bestowed upon those who were desirable. He wanted to be famous for fame itself and not because he had something of note to sell to the world. He was an all day long raving narcissist who fully believed he had what it took, whatever “what it took,” was in this world.

Sean was the quiet introvert, who was smart and had a cynical outlook on life. His hair was short and neat and his body was thin. He had nice blue eyes that radiated kindness. Whereas Brian saw individuals of lesser ability, Sean saw sameness in society. Men and women were all the same. People were according to his credo, out to get you, not in the paranoid sense, but rather to take advantage of you or degrade you and you could not trust them. “Trust,” he would exclaim in his mumbling voice, “is the source of all our woes.”

The difference between the two was striking, both in physicality and mentality. Sean in comparison to his friend, was skinny and frail, with his shoulders leaning forwards and the head arched towards the ground. He was passive in nature and avoided confrontation and took his blows and he was taking them now from his very friend and would be for the rest of his life. Beat a man and he either beats back or gets beaten. Sean unlike Brian always got beaten. The rain continued to pour down dancing off the gravel and washing dirt into little streams beside them. The wind was slight and it brushed against their faces. They could taste the rain water in their mouths as their shirts were drenched and muddy. They could smell the flowers of spring and sense the calmness that

spring brought to the world and it felt good. The air was thin and full of energy and it refreshed their souls.

“I told you man, I’m better, I always have been, always will be,” said Brian getting up and cleaning his dirty face with his right hand.

“You want it more, that’s all,” replied Sean, looking away into the distance, with the rain still firing down upon them.

“True, true. You have to be hungry for it, because nobody gives it to you. You have to take it.”

They both stood up and casually waited for a few seconds to get back their wind and calm themselves. Brian was more energetic in his movements, while Sean was rigid and stared into the night sky. Brian’s face was cleaner from the fight. He had a fat lip, but that was all. Sean on the other hand, had a bloody face, with a cut above his eye, but he seemed to enjoy the beating.

“You were going well until I knocked you,” exclaimed Brian with a wry smile as the rain began to ease.

“Yea, you caught me off guard with that.”

“Jesus man, what happened, once I had you knocked, you gave in.”

“Ah, I’m not one for the battle you know.”

“You’d beat me, if you wanted to, but you don’t care. It’s not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog.”

“I’m too nice,” said Sean with a little smile on his lips.

Brian moved towards him and leaned against a wall to rest himself, as he continued to clean his face.

“That’s your problem Sean, always have been too nice. Nice people get nowhere you know. This world, businesses, friends, even women, they demand that you are strong and confident, hell do what I do and be an arrogant son-of-a-bitch.”

Sean gave a slight contemptuous laugh and continued looking into the distance. There was not a lot to be seen in the deep of the night. They could hear the people chatting and dancing in the bar to the sound of 80’s music. There was no

chance now of going back into the pub with their clothes dirty and faces bruised.

“Man I remember you in school, all the women were checking you out and you wouldn’t even go near them. You were half way there, hell, you were 90% there, with your good looks and brains. All you had to do was chat to her?”

“Sibéal,” said Sean, slightly looking down.

“Sibéal Devane, that’s right. She was giving you all those weird signals, that women give when they are into you.”

“Body language is 80% of communication they say.”

“What more could she do?”

“Do we have to start this again. I didn’t want her. Nothing against her, she was beautiful, very attractive, but it wouldn’t work,” Sean retorted with a hint of anger in his tone.

“There you go again, shooting yourself down. Nothing works in this world, but we persevere. It’s a struggle, but Jesus Christ, you have to believe in yourself. If you don’t believe in yourself, no one will believe in you. All you had to do was be with her, hold her hand, make her laugh and other stuff.”

“Too much effort man. Everything is too much effort.”

“What do you mean effort? All you had to do was talk to her.”

“Me and people don’t go together. I just prefer being alone and not being known.”

“Yet you want to become a director and you don’t want to be around people and be known.”

Sean smiled a little as Brian looked at him perplexed.

“I want to be known as an artist, but I don’t want to be known,” exclaimed Sean.

“That’s what you call a paradox.”

“It’s an oxymoron,” responded Sean in a light-hearted manner.

“I think you may be choosing the wrong career, by becoming a director,” asserted Brian.

There was a cool silence. Sean gazed deeply into space, thinking about his future.

“Yea, it’s the writing I love. The writing releases me, it enables me to escape life, forget myself, it saves me.”

“From what?”

“From myself.”

“You always were peculiar I give you that, come on, we’ll head back to the house, get a night’s sleep.”

“Sure, sure.”

They started walking home and chatted about so many things involving films and dreams and drinking. The rain had eased, as the bright stars began to show themselves and the casual moonlight shone. The dead of the night was calming and sensual. They could smell the tar off the road from the rain that had fallen on it. They were drenched wet and shivering but they didn’t mind. The dew of the night became more visible now as they could see the countryside and the dark green fields full of grass and hedges and cows and sheep. They smiled and talked like best friends do and thanked the heavens.

“Would you not stick to the writing, directors must be people-people if you know what I mean,” asked Brian.

“You got a point, but Kubrick wasn’t, neither was Hitchcock, nor is Malick.”

“Touché, but still you have to enjoy being around people and getting up to meet people and if you make it, you will have to be in front of the cameras and so on.”

“I wouldn’t be able to handle the fame. God, being famous would be a killer.”

“Most people don’t consider fame, but it’s tough. You have to enjoy the attention.”

“Which you do!” retorted Sean in a belittling manner.

“I’d love it. The money, drugs, women. I’d go mental.”

“You have to be confident within yourself. The camera can destroy you, you know,” said Sean with a grimace.

“Yea, true and they haunt you, like your shadow, day and night, reminding you of what you did years ago,”

“Choices, one must live and perhaps die by them. You have to be careful in this world. To be honest, you would be better just retreating from it all.”

“Lock yourself in your house?” enquired Brian.

“Yea, why not. If there are no people in your life, you have no stress. People don’t understand this.”

“What, you should just avoid people altogether?”

“Pretty much, if you wish to live a pure life, without anxiety.”

“The world, the economies, relationships, they all run on men and women working together. If we all stopped fighting the world would collapse,” retorted Brian laughing as they continued to walk home, in the darkness, with the stars flickering above them and the calm countryside either side of them.

“That’s life. When everyone suffers, that is life as we know it,” Brian exclaimed.

“Yea, a mad world, is one in which there is no madness. I just wish you could do all you wanted in life, without the adoration that comes with it. You can’t succeed in this world and be left alone,”

“What exactly do you want?”

“Success without succeeding; glory without being glorious; to live without living.”

“You can’t have it all. It’s a trade-off, like that uncertainty principle.”

“Everything is a trade off in life,” retorted Sean.

“Take the good with the bad and the bad with the good,” laughed Brian. “I want it all good. But then again don’t we all.”

“That’s the problem. One must cater for the unpredictable nature of society. But I wouldn’t worry too much man. We are young, free and living it up. What more can one want?”

They passed by a house as the rain and clouds began to enclose on them again. The weather in Ireland was like a clock, always in constant change. There was one light on in this house in the corner on the top right and the curtains were open. A young woman could be seen dancing, like a ballerina with such grace. She was wearing a red dress and had long dark hair. Both Sean and Brian stopped in awe of this woman that had enchanted them as the rain began to pour from the heavens again and drenched them.

“How about her?” asked Sean.

“There she is,” said Brian as the rain bounced off his head.

“She’s always dancing, damn it, she is beautiful,” Sean exclaimed.

“I want to marry her.... I will marry her.... I will have her,” said Brian in a forceful way, engrossed by her beauty.

They continued to watch as she danced with such serene beauty, like a falcon flying in the wind. Such was the composure that the two men were locked onto this vision. They would carry with them this moment for the rest of their lives, this haunting memory of the woman in red dancing with such grace as they looked on with the sad dreary rain slipping off their faces.

Tears in Rain: The Apartment

Los Angeles was different from what they had imagined. They saw nice houses, expensive cars, flashy clothes and a city built out of chrome. What they actually saw when they first arrived was a city that had its own problems, just like any city does. The streets were corroded with crime; its houses were old and crumbling and its people were as poor as they were rich. It was a cruel awakening for our three young protagonists. Whereas Brian and Sibéal were a little startled by what they observed, Sean was more realistic, for he knew that it is foolish to dream when you can see. He saw alright. He saw thousands of young souls who were desperate to become stars. He saw waiters and waitresses struggling to make ends meet, whilst hopelessly clinging to false fantasies of success. He saw failure after failure. He saw those at the top taking advantage of the poor at the bottom. He saw a ruthless city that would tear a person apart like a spider feasting on a fly.

They got an apartment, but in a not so desirable part of town, where police sirens and fire ambulances were frequently heard in the darkness of the night and silenced the aspirations of its inhabitants. It was a small three bedroomed apartment that was equipped with the bare essentials, but lacking in space that people need to be fully content within themselves. There was a bathroom and kitchen dining area, with a tiny old fashioned telly that struggled to come on most of the time. A fridge was tucked in the corner, which was full of flies when they opened it first because it hadn't been plugged in. An oven sat nestled next to that and there was a rusty sink. The couch was ragged and torn and could only seat two people, whilst the third person had to sit on the chair that was coupled with the cracked table. The walls were tearing apart and a sizable crack was visible on the face near the only window in the kitchen. Their rooms were tiny, infused with single beds and without bed sheets. There were a few stains on one of the beds, of which Sean reluctantly agreed to sleep on.

So began their odyssey in the City of Angels. They had come to these shores with high hopes, their youth and their whole lives ahead of them. They were calm, the sort of calmness that comes with the absence of problems or bills to pay. Their spirits were good for they smoked and drank and tried to enjoy America. They danced through the gritty unforgiving streets because they were young and that is what the young do. They would go to coffee shops and savour the finest blend that America had to offer and chat and talk in the naked sunshine. They would sit for hours and pretend they were on some avenue in

Paris and were part of a sophisticated bunch of artists who knew it all. Then they would go down to a pub when the sun was falling asleep and the arrogant night was coming out to play and the paths were still roasting from the sunshine that had hit them during the day and the coldness would sweep in like a hockey skater and make them feel anxious. They could hear the city in full flow, its noises and fights and sirens. It was brilliant to be young and to be able to move and dance and jump.

They got into fights and were chased and did all the things that only the young can do and can get away with. Brian would drink till he could not see and fell off tables, slit his face, cut his clothes, chipped teeth and got into fights over nothing. Every time Sean was tasked with getting him out of the situation. Whereas Brian lived, Sean observed; where Brian danced, Sean sat back and watched on at his friend living the good young life. So many pubs were frequented, to get over their failures on this grand land. They would sit in the amber soaked lights, sipping whiskey and chatting about good old Ireland and wondering what their school friends and mates were doing back at home and wondering were they thinking about them too. One night as they stumbled out of a pub together and Sean had drunk a bit too much, they both fell asleep on the pavement of LA. Some locals were worried and rang an ambulance and they were taken to hospital. The problem was not drunkenness or fainting. The problem was they were young and Irish, which is a deadly combination.

Sibéal was more scientific in her approach to this new climate. She was smart. She looked at the angles within her field of vision and tried to maximise her return. So she would only get talking to those who could in some way help her in her quest for success. What was the point in talking to the person you love, if all he can give you is love? She wasn't narcissistic in nature like Brian, but she did understand how things worked in this system. She liked to be punctual and be in control. She knew that using her beauty to gain advantage was a good ploy. As far as she was aware, every hungry soul in the land tried the same trick. Build up contacts, use your assets and always smile, even at those who grimace.

"Kubrick for me, is the greatest. He knew the rules of cinema," said Sean seated on the wooden chair with his hand crouched on the table, grasping a bottle of beer.

“There are no rules, you just go out and make a film and hope for the best,” retorted Brian sitting next to Sibéal on the worn blue couch.

“There are rules to everything, as Wittgenstein said.”

“Who’s Wittgenstein?” asked Sibéal politely.

“Arguably the most influential philosopher of the 20th century.”

“So he wasn’t a film maker then,” said Brian.

“No.”

“So what’s your point?” asked Brian cutely.

“My point is, he said there are rules to language, to the way we speak and how we assert ourselves. There are rules to cinema as well and how to make a good film.”

“There are rules for everything in life, relationships, friendships, even how you should live,” said Sibéal slightly smiling.

“People just live,” said Brian, “I don’t see the rules.”

“They are never written down, but they are quietly demanded. Like you have to get a job and start a family and so on.”

“People just generally do these things because it’s what people do.”

“People do them, because they are quietly told to do them. Society has created them. Like what Thoreau said: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.””

“What does that even mean?” wondered Sibéal, bemused at how the conversation was going, occasionally taking a drink from her bottle of beer.

“That we are desperate for women!” remarked Brian chuckling.

Brian and Sibéal laughed at this assertion while the serious Sean got up and looked away.

“It means we are living lives we don’t wish to live. That we are tied down by relationships and work and what is expected of you.”

“That makes sense. We are desperate to escape,” said Sibéal.

“Exactly.”

Brian was a bit unsure of the conversation.

“I still don’t get it. You are saying people are unhappy.”

“Precisely.”

“I want to get married and have a job. Do I look unhappy?”

“Wait till you are 70 years old and stuck with a wrinkly old woman,” exclaimed Sibéal smiling.

“Seriously though,” asserted Brian moving his arms in a display of domination. “I’ve dated and had to work at the same time. And I loved it.”

“Yea, but we are young now and free. We are like Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty. We don’t have kids and wives to attend to,” said Sean.

“I’m Dean I take it!”

“Of course man,” said Sean.

“Who am I in this?” asked Sibéal.

“What’s her name, Mary Lou.”

“She was full of energy, in the film of course,” said Sibéal.

“Ah, you have to read the book. If there is one book anyone young should read, it’s On the Road,” remarked Sean.

“With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road,” quoted Brian.

“We are all on the road you know,” Sean said.

“The road of life, who knows what will happen, who cares,” said Sibéal.

“Well said,” said Brian bringing the lighter next to his cigarette. “The ending was so sad as well. “...*I think of Dean Moriarty.*” It was a bit like the ending of Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms, you know when his wife dies giving birth.”

“Life can be so cruel,” exclaimed Sibéal.

“It doesn’t matter how well you plan things, even in this age of technology, people still struggle and still suffer. When life is good, its kind and when you struggle, you struggle badly. It’s a great struggle,” said Sean.

“I’m not looking forward to it,” retorted Brian smiling. “All this drinking and smoking has to take its toll. But then again that’s why I do drink and smoke, because life is tough.”

“Hemingway certainly knew this. We all bleed.”

“Even for a man who had it all, he suffered.”

“As long as it isn’t raining, I don’t really care. I just don’t get some people though. They have everything, a house, a car, good income and yet they are unhappy,” said Sibéal.

“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation for sure,” exclaimed Sean.

The all laughed and drank and smoked a bit more, passing around the cigarette.

“But, I mean, you’re not in jail, you’re not struggling to feed yourself and so on,” enquired Sibéal.

“Some of us are melancholic,” remarked Brian.

“And some are just never happy with what they have,” retorted Sean at Brian’s insinuation.

“They just want more and when they get more, they want it better,” said Sibéal acting as a peace maker.

“Kubrick was like that. What was it, nearly a hundred takes with Jack Nicolson during the scene where he goes mad.”

“A hundred takes, I’d go mad,” puzzled Sibéal.

“You already are! We are all mad for sure,” said Sean. “Kubrick knew the rules for making good cinema.”

“What are they? I want to know,” asked Brian inquisitively.

“Trade secrets Brian! No, one rule is that the cinematography must be good. Cinematography is to cinema what lingerie is to a woman.”

“That’s nicely put. I presume it means it will draw you in better,” said Sibéal.

“Exactly. You can’t make a decent film, without good cinematography. Like Fincher. Yea, his cinematography is perfection. But like I said, this is part of the rules that make a great film. There are rules that must be adhered to. Every work of art has engineering behind it, be it a painting, a book or a film. Even a cartoon has rules.”

“Cartoons! Who even cares about them,” exclaimed Brian.

“They are worth more money to Hollywood than any Malick film. Can’t beat The Lion King.”

“The Lion King!” remarked Brian.

“What’s wrong with The Lion King?” asked Sibéal of Brian.

“It’s a bloody cartoon, that is what is wrong with it,” he replied.

“It’s still class. It’s the best cartoon film ever made. Great songs.”

“Ah, you just can’t be considered great though, if you are making cartoons.”

“That’s your problem Brian. You are chasing success, not love.”

“Aren’t all men.”

“They are chasing image. Image is what they are after. Image is what haunts us,” interjected Sean.

“What are you on about?” asked Brian.

“Men chase money, fame and job promotions because they simply make the man in question more desirable, to society, to women.”

Brian was less than impressed and resorted to sarcasm to dismiss this point.

“Yea, that’s why I want to be successful, because I am only interested in image. I want to make great films.”

“Do you? Or do you want great films to make you look great? You don’t go after greatness or money or fame. You go after trying to make a difference and being curious. The success comes from them. The journey is what matters not the destination.”

“Come on, I want to make good films.”

“Because you are interested in the art,” said Sean condescendingly.

“Just admit it Brian. You want to be famous, you want money, you want women. You have about as much interest in making a film that is worthwhile, as an Eskimo has in buying ice,” said Sibéal.

“Ah now, that’s harsh.”

“At least Sean here, actually understands film and knows what will work and I suppose how it works. There are rules behind everything. A chef that cooks a good meal understands the rules just as a director does. You can’t just go and pick up the camera and start filming and “hope-for-the-best.”

“It’s a pity though, I can’t speak,” said Sean quietly looking away.

“And I don’t know,” remarked Brian.

“Perhaps you could work together. Sean does the thinking and Brian does the talking.”

“Or perhaps you could just pretend to know, like you do now,” said Sean.

“A lot of us just pretend to know or pretend to care,” exclaimed Sibéal wisely.

“A lot of us walk through life pretending to care. Most of us however don’t care. We lack empathy and basic knowledge. We are married to people who don’t love us, working in a job that does not satisfy us, are being dictated by a government who steals from us and live in a universe that is indifferent to us. We are chained by conformity. This world is the Theatre of Conformists. And we all live the same petty lives and we wake up every morning and do the same routine for forty years.”

“That’s exactly why I want to become a dancer. To swim against the current. To be different,” said Sibéal.

“It’s more risky, but if you pull it off, it gives a better return,” said Sean.

“It’s like putting your money in the bank at a fixed interest rate or variable. Fixed gives you a stable return, but little reward. Variable, you can win big or lose big.”

“What does one want? Security or passion?” asked Sibéal gazing at the ceiling.

“That’s it. The world runs on risk. If everyone played it safe, the centre would fall apart. How does one live in this world?”

“You kind of just take every day as it comes. Live a life of passion,” Sibéal said.

“You have got to think as well. Too much confidence is a dangerous thing. Hollywood is full of stars and the jails are full of convicted criminals, because of confidence. The very trait we demand of society is the same trait that enables CNN to show 24-hour news. I sometimes wish I could live on an island all by myself.”

“That would be ideal, when I retire of course,” remarked Sibéal.

“Away from everyone Sean. A bit alienated, isn’t it,” enthused Brian.

“Away from everyone. No people, no stress. I’d go fishing every day and look at the stars at night.”

“What happens if you get the flu?” asked Brian laughing.

“I haven’t really thought this through. Of course, I would have to have coffee and cigarettes. God, it would be great. Just me on my own, free to do what I want. Just to look at the stars every night and dream. I do like those stars.”

Tears in Rain: The Party

They frequented parties like the sun frequents southern Spain in the summer time. It was a chance to meet and establish acquaintances within the film scene. The name of the game was to seduce the right person at the right time and hope that you convince them to remember you and that was all the party members tried to do. They believed they had talent, but everyone does. Alas all they had in reality was hope, a fool's hope, but hope nonetheless. There were numerous of these shindigs occurring throughout the greater LA area. They weren't exactly what we would deem VIP houses of the divine, for the invitees were all young inexperienced actors, directors and producers who sought a more champagne life like that of the gods.

Sibéal, Brian and Sean attended these poor status parties on numerous occasions. They were low in money and so had to steal drinks in order to quench their thirst. Sibéal would distract the men, Brian would lead them to another corner of the party and Sean would sweep in and take the drinks. It was a good plan, although Sean did express guilt over his actions. The party itself was in a rundown house. There was no swimming pool or private cinema as was generally seen on films or images beamed across the Atlantic Ocean on the awards night. It was a two-story house with a broken stairs, stripped painting and a small back yard that had not been trimmed in years. The revellers mingled and laughed and got high on drugs and drink and tried to forget their woes. There were a few big guns here and by big guns I mean producers or at least would be producers. Not the successful kind though, but rather the kind that were so self-absorbed that they failed to realize just how insignificant they really were within life and more to the point in the film industry.

They jumped about and drank and smoked endlessly and discussed the scene and all the failure and all their hopes of eventually making it big in Hollywood. Some people would start throwing chairs in a drunken rage or jumping on tables and small playful fights would break out every now and again. Drinks would flow like rivers and the people accepted each other for what they were. Drugs circulated the party like the cool air that flows from an air conditioner on a warm sweltering hot day. Brian when he first saw them was surprized and reluctant to engage with such demons, but was eventually won over by the charisma of the dealers. He began with ecstasy and got promoted to cocaine after a while, on which he was now hooked and spent all his earnings. Then when he was deprived of his drug of choice he would become angry and his

physique would become tense and overpowering and he would throw fits of rage. Sean and Sibéal were smart, for they never went near those chemicals, despite the incessant pressure from Brian on them to take them. The drugs did have one positive and that was one could quickly build up contacts and gain friends among those who were in the group. Brian became a popular man with the dealers and pushers alike, whereas Sean was still as alienated as he was back in Ireland.

Brian would often leave the apartment and go off partying randomly with people whom he didn't know. He would stay out till early in the morning and occasionally didn't return home at all, in which case Sean and Sibéal would get worried. He always came home eventually it must be said. Although one night he wandered off and was not seen for three whole days. He didn't even make contact with his Irish pals to let them know he was ok. Where he went was madness. He often ventured far outside California and was taken to the most unusual drug fuelled LSD parties where anything and everything went on. Sex, crime and freedom were on the agenda. It was weird he would think looking back at some party and not being able to remember what he did. That was the life he loved. The unpredictability of the day, the uncertainty of the young starry night, where the road took him anywhere and sometimes took him everywhere.

And Brian was being Brian. He was hooking up with three girls at once. He was initially trying to balance two but then he met a nice waitress in a steakhouse and got chatting to her and they exchanged numbers and he was meeting her as well. One night he had to see all three under the same moonlight and he loved it. Whereas another man would have been under stress or nervous about balancing three women, Brian rushed into it without hesitation. Of course, there were close calls from time to time because two of the girls lived near each other and so he had to be careful. "But what was the worst that could happen," he thought. They weren't likely to kill him. Ah, but all good things come to an end and when he wasn't giving one woman enough attention she became distraught and suspicious and so he lost her. But the other two seemed content with the system and he kept up the façade for well over a year before he tired of both of them.

Sibéal in some ways was like Brian. She was the kind of girl who lived in the moment. She sucked enjoyment from a vanilla milkshake. She was almost a hybrid between Sean and Brian. She enjoyed herself like Brian did and got to know many different people. But she also was intelligent in that she didn't go on a destructive path like Brian. She like Sean was cautious and logical when

dealing with the choices life threw up. Whereas Brian was hell bent on enjoying life regardless of the consequences, Sibéal refused to engage in any behaviour that would be deemed dangerous. She didn't take drugs or drink herself senseless. She looked after herself.

Sean on the other hand was an anxious animal. It must have been a chemical imbalance for when he was around people he would become stricken with the angst and he would start fidgeting and twisting his hands in unusual ways. His mind seemed to shut down when amongst other people. Whereas Brian and Sibéal grew into others, Sean became further disintegrated. He could only be himself around people he knew for years. He would stutter and stammer when trying to talk to people he had just met. He detested meeting new people for this reason and left the talking to Brian on most occasions. He avoided binge drinking as well for this reason. The drink made him more sociable and gave a false representation of him to others. "You got to try and live," they would tell him. "Everything is a gamble. Every choice is a chance and every chance a choice." He would say that choices and chances ended up getting us into trouble. But this was life. People lived and in the process of living they made mistakes. Sean too feared the opinion of others. He feared being thought of negatively in the eyes of others. He didn't like making mistakes for mistakes carried the weight of a negative opinion.

"I know you have it, but so does everyone, apparently," said the producer to Sibéal, as he drank and smoked.

"I have dreams," she replied occasionally sipping her drink.

"So does everyone."

"But mine are different, they can be achieved."

"Look Sibéal, you are a good-looking girl, but so are lots of girls. There is a sea of beautiful talent out there. The question is, what are you prepared to do?"

"It depends on what I will have to do," said Sibéal in a seductive manner, maintaining eye contact for an extended period. "Where there is a will, there is a way."

"Do you have any idea of the number of men and women we see every year, who say the exact same things as you do. "Oh, I want to be a star; it's my dream to be an artist; this is all I've ever wanted to be since I was young." Time

changes, but the foolishness stays the same. Can you not see there are many of you and we hold the aces. We choose, you fall in line.”

“I just want a chance, one chance,” remarked Sibéal.

“Not everyone gets a chance. We simply can’t make everyone succeed. People must fail, so some can succeed.”

“One chance, even a small one.”

“Again you must possess something that is valuable. If you can give me what I want, I can give you what you want. And so much more,” said the producer flirting with her.

In truth this producer was just a charlatan. He would use Sibéal for what he wanted and then dump her when she was no longer useful. There was a lot of these spoofers in LA. Men who pretended to be the top brass, but in reality they just know that it is what women want to hear.

Brian as well was trying to seduce a producer into giving him a chance at the big stage. Brian for what it was worth was a good charmer and had the gift of the gab.

“So I got these ideas and hopefully if you have the time we can discuss them,” said Brian.

“How much are you looking for?” asked the producer.

“Five million should do the job.”

“I’ve only known you for maybe twenty minutes and you want me to part with five million of my own money.”

“For five million you can get back a hundred million.”

“If only it were so easy in life.”

“When you understand film, it is easy.”

“It’s amazing, we have so many critics in this world. Do you know why?”

“They just want to earn a living,” retorted Brian.

“That and the fact that they can’t actually do what it is they are criticising. My father used tell me, the easiest job in the world is being critical and we all have the capacity to do it. So if we fail, we criticise. Great world isn’t it.”

“You got to trust me.”

“If I trusted everyone in this business, I’d be broke!”

“What can I do to get ahead in this business?”

“There is no golden bullet. One cannot get something for nothing and if you do, it’s a scam. You work hard, try your best and hope for the best. Most people in this business fail. Most people get nowhere. For every star, there are thousands of people who wander the empty streets. This is not business, this is life, this is capitalism. And people wonder why the stars have so much fans and popularity. It’s because they are the only ray of sunshine those fans have in their miserable existence. So work hard, smile and appreciate your life. The odds kind of shift in your favour then.”

“When do I start?” asked Brian laughing.

“We are always looking for assistant directors, so call down. But there is no guarantee that this will get you anywhere.”

“Ah well, a warm destination often has an icy start.”

“And an end as well.”

Sean was not partaking in the action as usual. He was different in this respect. The competition of the world and the desire to be number one in society did not bother him as he would be content to live on an island or on a farm and work alone. He stood gazing into the sky line wondering and dreaming about a future he knew he would not achieve. He was like a shadow on a cold frozen moon. He had no soul or energy. He did not belong amongst the people. He gazed up at the stars wondering what it would be like to see the world from outside and look upon this planet and not be part of it. He could feel the frost of the night sting his skin. He was in his own corner smoking away contently and not involving himself with the women or the producers like the other men were.

“Do you have a light?” asked a young woman around the same age.

“Sure, sure.”

“I’ve been watching you smoke about five or six since you arrived at the party.”

“I only smoke when I socialize,” he replied avoiding eye contact.

“Why?”

“So I don’t have to talk.”

“Oh, ok, I won’t bother you then,” said the woman smiling.

“No, no it’s grand. I was just looking at the stars, like Van Gogh used.”

“Van who?”

“Van Gogh, Dutch painter. Considered one of the greatest and yet he never sold a painting in his life.”

“He mustn’t have been too good then.”

“Ah, some people may disagree, particularly the man who bought his painting for forty million.”

There was a stony silence as Sean waited for the woman to make the next move.

“How’s it he didn’t sell during his life?”

“I get the feeling he didn’t think they were worth selling. Same with Franz Kafka. Never published a book and wanted to burn all he had written.”

“The term Kafkaesque is from him.”

“Exactly. The Trial, Metamorphosis and more. Hard to read, but his themes are vibrant. Alienation, suffering, existentialism and so on.”

“A bit heavy for me then,” said the woman slightly smiling.

“I’d stick to the less philosophical types.”

Silence again prevailed as they both waited for something to be said.

“I love that quote by Kafka. “You can turn away from the suffering and perhaps it is in your personality to turn away, but turning away is the one suffering you could avoid,”” said Sean.

“What does that even mean?”

“I get that every time I say it. It means the world is full of pain and trying to hide from the pain, causes pain in itself. You just have to accept what you see as what you see. You cannot change the world, but only yourself.”

“Sort of, is the glass half empty or full?”

“A variation of it.”

“I don’t mean to be rude, but where is the pain?”

“Wars, famine, animal abuse and so on. You don’t have to see the pain to feel it. Take the worst thing you can imagine and I guarantee it has happened or will happen in the future, such is the world and man within it.”

“Ah, yes, I’d blame man for it all. That’s the reason I am still working as a waitress. I must say this is a different conversation from what I usually have.”

She laughed at this suggestion while Sean casually smiled not mirroring her humour.

“Man is the most wicked animal of all.”

“True.....” she replied.

Another dark silence overcame the stuttering conversation. As they both stood near each other and were slightly uncomfortable. Sean then broke the tension with a story.

“I visited South Africa a few years ago with friends. We went on one of those wildlife adventures. You know, driving around in a sort of truck or van, looking at the animals. It was great. Elephants, cheetahs, buffalo and so on. And then we came across a gazelle herd. It was all good. We were chatting and laughing. They were eating grass and doing what gazelle do. They were indifferent to our presence, eating grass and lying about. Then out of nowhere a baboon adult male encroached on the gazelle herd. He managed to ensnare a young baby gazelle that had been separated from its mother. Caught it around the neck and wouldn’t let it go, real tight. What the baboon did next made me sick. He proceeded to eat the poor animal alive for forty minutes. He started at the young gazelle’s legs, then went to his stomach and worked his way up. And all the time the gazelle was kicking and screaming in such severe and horrible pain. The squeals from the gazelle were terrible, haunting. And we kept looking on and did nothing. We sat and watched like it was a movie, casual observers.

Eventually he ate enough parts, that the poor animal died, but it took about forty minutes. Revolting I thought. And at the end of the day, with the sun setting and the night creeping in, when we were all drinking and laughing and had forgotten and were talking about our dreams and how good it is to be alive in such a sun, I went out for smoke and looked at the sky, like I am doing now actually and thought to myself, “this is some cruel world we live in, but a cruel world is better than no world.””

The woman looked at him as if he was a ghost. This man was very different from the guys she was used to talking to. He didn't seem to understand the rules of the game.

Death is the Hunter

I am in the asylum again. I hate being here. It is the doctors that should be regulated and not me. Anyhow, I will keep a diary of my thoughts while I am here. Hopefully I won't be too long here.

1

I want to be famous without being famous. Is that such a thing? I despise being known. But I exist and make the best of it. Existence is a crime and opinion is the punishment. We are moulded by society. Society is like Michelangelo chiselling at the block of marble until it became David. Society hacks away at your individuality until you become one of society. You trade who you are for who you want to be.

Look at the famous person. They are controlled. The viewing public dictates how they behave. They thus live a very predictable existence. They cannot deviate from the chosen path. If they do, they are ridiculed. Laughter you see is one of the puppeteers of society. It controls us just as much as the eagerness to earn money does. We strive not to be humiliated. We suffer just to not be stigmatized. And in order to not be stigmatized we must hit certain targets. Men behave as men and women must behave as women.

A huge part of our existence is an exercise in avoiding laughter. We seek out adoration as a response to this threat.

We kill for fame and it ends up killing us. In today's world, everyone is a journalist. If you expose yourself to society, you run the risk of being criticised even by people you have never met. This is what I fear. I fear becoming famous and then being tormented by the prying eyes of society. But you can apply this dilemma to even the non-famous person. They must work and as such must be wary of criticism from those they interact with. We are all famous in our own little ways.

2

I am on numerous anonymous internet forums. This is how I communicate with society. Nobody knows who I am and because of this, they cannot attack me. I am a ghost. I do not exist. I change identities regularly. Such a pity you cannot do this in the real world. Once known you cannot be someone else. Once known, you are condemned.

This is why there is so much pattern in life. All the propaganda centres around the idea that we are making our own choices. This is inherently false. Society decides how we choose. We react to the threat of stigma from society. Society moulds us, much like a painter composes a picture.

It never dawns on people that if they just live alone, away from society, they can be who they so deem. Such is the inculcation that they cannot sacrifice love for anything else.

3

I dreamed of becoming an artist. The next Franz Kafka or Van Gogh. I am damaged like them. Perhaps I will cut off my ear and only then will society understand me. I tried becoming a writer, then a poet, then a pianist, then a painter. But I failed at all of them. Which is not a bad thing. Fame would kill me. Fame drastically reduces your life span. I was reading an article about all these famous reality tv stars that have committed suicide. They were sure fame was the solution, when it became the problem. They thought everyone would love them and then they would be happy. But the dream turned into a nightmare.

4

I cannot bear myself much. I look into the mirror and see shame staring right back. It is like my face is scarred from being burned or having acid thrown in it. I cannot bear people see me and acknowledge me. They strike me down with their eyes. I have lesions all over my body or at least it seems like I do. Hideous red scars like someone with Kaposi Sarcoma. I am stigmatized like the criminal or the person who is HIV positive. At best all I can do is live alone and try to avoid people. The silence does not laugh at me.

5

I am working on a book. It is about the Soviet Union during Stalin. I have high hopes for it. Perhaps it will sell millions and make me some money. But then I am afraid of what I would do with the fame. Perhaps it would be better if I fail. At least with failure I can just get on with my life. Anyhow the book is unfinished. I am struggling to write it. The ideas are not coming fast. I only write a bit here and there. I used be able to write so much. Now I have writers block.

6

Should I visit escorts? I am tempted. But it is illegal where I am from. If I get caught, I could not live with the shame. I would be all over the papers. Anyhow I don't think I would enjoy sex. It seems like too much effort. It is too much effort to get an erection. I could never date a woman. She would control me. And I would have to pretend to love her. I would have to play a role like an actor does. I have turned down so many women. It was just too much effort to go on dates with them and love them.

7

I fear fame far more than failure. I am used to failure. I am failure in the eyes of others and perfectly fine with such an existence. But fame would be torture. Everyone laughs at you and laughter is just a form of stigma. So many reality tv stars have committed suicide because of fame. They thought it would make them happy, when it only killed them. I don't think the average person realizes what it would be like to be famous. The closest we come to it is through education and low and behold so many adolescent's kill themselves too. We are all famous in our own little way and that is why we want to be rich, beautiful, successful and so on. We want to placate the people in our lives.

8

In ways it is too much effort to be famous. It is too much effort to do anything. I seem to lack motivation. Existence is too much of an effort. I don't want love or wealth or success. I just want to be left alone. Only in the solitude can I be happy. Only when I do not exist can I exist. I am so lazy. It is easier in life to just be a failure.

9

I wear the same clothes all the time. I do not change them. I am too lazy to change them. I am not like other people who are motivated by sex. I am just happy to exist. I exist on the best terms I can.

10

I am running. I have been running all my life. But you cannot run from yourself. I used just keep moving to a different area and then I would meet new people there. But after a while I would get fed up so I would just move to a different

area and renew the whole process. But I got fed up. Now I just keep to myself. I try not to make friends. I try to live in complete solitude. I keep away from society much like a wild animal does. And I love it.

11

I have written and self-published other books and I pray that they will fail. I pray that they will get negative reviews. I cannot bear the thought of being famous and a success. All my mistakes will become public knowledge. Fame would just decrease my life expectancy and I enjoy life to a degree. I enjoy being anonymous and not being known. I detest exposure.

12

RD Laing's *The Divided Self* was an inspiration to me. It is a biography of my existence. He approaches the schizoid dilemma brilliantly. How they seek anonymity and find peace with such an existence. Such a person keeps moving. They keep shifting from place to place and perhaps job to job. They go from being known to being anonymous to back to being known. That is what I have been doing all my life. If only I could find some lonely island where I could be all by myself.

13

Society is the authoritarian dictator. Not the government or the CEO's or the 1%. It is your best friends that kill you with a smile on their faces. It is your family that determines your wills and wants. If the government came out and said they want you to have two children to sustain the economic system, you would laugh in their faces. But when your best friends tell you or your parents, you just accept their demands without so much of a blink of an eye.

We are all on trial. Conformity is our prison sentence. We think we are free. If we are, why are all our choices the same? They are because we are regulated just like the mentally ill and prisoners are. Regulated by whom? By society. Society is both the asylum and the psychiatrist in one.

14

The system preys on our desperation to be happy. That is how they seduce us into conforming. That is how they brainwash us. We are so desperate to be happy when we are forty years old. The death anxiety attacks us. We fear losing

out on not being happy in the future if we refuse to conform. The system preys on our desperation to be madly happy. And how do we become happy then? Through the family and work. Once we obtain those two things, we can then declare how happy we are. But pretending to be happy is not happiness.

I had a girl interested in me a while back. I would have loved to have screamed at her: “Ciara you are so brainwashed you don’t even realize you are brainwashed.” That is how good the propagandization is, for not once in her fifteen years of adulthood has she questioned why she wants to be a wife and mother to two kids by the time she is forty. Not once. Society has got to her and got to her when she was young. She has effectively been groomed by the system. But when the grooming benefits the economic template, we do not call it grooming; we call it life.

Men and women alike are just pawns for the economic system. Love is not this wonderful phenomenon; it is an instrument of the economic system.

15

Society does not love you nor does it hate you. Society is indifferent to you. I have known a few people that have committed suicide. Life has just moved on as if they never existed. They have simply become forgotten about in the sands of time like that great poem Ozymandias. No one cares about you unless you are famous or a sex offender and they are kind of the same thing.

This is what makes narcissism so futile. The narcissist wants to be loved by everyone. They want to be approved or endorsed. But they want this endorsement off people who will never actually care about them. Take a narcissistic woman for example. She tends to her appearance as if her life depends on it, just so when she is walking down the street, men will think she is beautiful. But if she died right now, the men whose heads she wishes to turn would not care. And likewise, if one of the said men died, she would not care about him. Society is inherently indifferent to you. It is as if you are alive without living.

16

I just want to find an empty island and retire all by myself. Sort of like the Lake Isle of Innisfree. Such a beautiful poem. As long as I had coffee and cigarettes, I would be content. And there would be no humans there. I would be all alone with the blue water and the golden sand. That is my dream.

17

School was the devil toying with me for his own amusement. Every day I had to walk in was torture. They looked at me, they laughed at me, they tormented me. It was like I was a rapist.

I cannot bear myself but the only difference now is that I put up with myself. The humiliation has never abandoned me.

18

I am struggling to write anything with my new book about the secret police in Soviet Russia during Stalin's time. I seem to have writers block. I want to show the paranoia that was a given at the time and make it be an analogy for my mind. But I cannot seem to write anything in this hospital. There are too many people. Maybe it is the medication that has interfered with my mind.

I was going to discuss the authorities and the peasants and get their viewpoint with regards the whole situation. And perhaps the secret police too. But I cannot write anymore.

19

Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* really is an astonishing film. Like Antonioni's other work such as *La Notte* and *L'Avventura* he really gets to what real life is like. It is not glamourized like Hollywood likes to do. I remember the first time I saw *The Passenger* and thinking it was an absolute masterpiece. Antonioni and Ingmar Bergman were two masterful directors and some of the biggest influences on me.

My fiction books really are a combination of Kerouac, Hemingway, Kafka, Antonioni, Malick and Bergman. Those were the biggest influences on me.

The film *The Passenger* was probably the biggest influence on my fiction work. The whole idea that if you could just start anew, that if you could change your whole identity and start from a clean slate, that life would be somehow better. That if only you could escape your previous existence, life would suddenly become better. But as the said film details, it does not turn out like that. Ultimately, you cannot run from yourself.

20

It is hard to overcome the shame that every human being comes from semen. How do men and women live. Men have a horrible penis and women are addicted to it.

Geniuses don't have sex.

21

Sometimes I fantasize about being a genius and accepting awards. Sometimes it is by being a sociologist or a football player or a pianist. But the adoration would be short lived. It would suddenly morph into stigma. Success would be the worst thing that could happen me. I want fame and I don't want it. If I ever became famous. That would be the end. All my mistakes and insecurities would be made public.

22

Van Gogh understood the power of fame. It was just as he was taking off that he committed suicide. He was in a bind as am I, as is most of society. They have to work and hence must expose themselves to society. But this exposure comes at a price and that is conformity.

Van Gogh they say suffered severe mental illness. Perhaps that was what made him a genius. But it destroyed him. Existence became unbearable.

I just wish everyone could become famous just to see that it is not the solution to your problems.

Life is complex; even in the lap of glorious success one can become lost. Is life magic or tragic?

23

My head goes in moments. My mistakes haunt me. I have spent my existence trying not to exist. I don't like seeing myself. I wish I could erase myself from the minds of those that know me. I wish I could just be unknown. I hate being known. Now I have to say hello to the doctors and nurses. If I could just escape this world. Where I can run, just as fast as I can, to the middle of nowhere.

I cannot have sex. I become known and hunted. I cannot have friends. They come to know me. I must live alone.

I want negative reviews. I want to be seen as a failure. That I can live with because I am in good company. I have a thirst for anonymity. A hunger to write. A fear of success. Success will kill me. If I could just avoid writing and avoid so much trouble. Why does fortune favour some and let the rest go free?

I have to hide.

24

School was a humiliation. Every day I was laughed at. They tormented me. And then I tormented myself. Every day I had to go in and suffer. Now I just live alone. I cannot be attacked anymore. Society is not for me and not the other way around.

Education is a parasitic wasp. It takes over your mind and determines your cravings. You cannot accomplish much with friends; they distract you.

Summer

The Abyss of Nothing: Part II

The Narcissist

The Narcissist had grown up in Southern Texas on a farm with his brothers and sister. He grew up a strong willed individual but only because he had adopted a false sense of confidence. He set himself on a path towards becoming a banker. He moved from the calm countryside of Texas to the vibrant and greed infested financial sectors of Manhattan. He slaved his way towards a financial services job through earning a degree in finance in Harvard whilst working at the weekend washing dishes. His goal was to achieve in life and by that he meant live the good life.

At Harvard he was smothered in a class that mirrored his personality. The students were upper class in both psychology and status. They lived on the finest and could not tolerate sub-standard service be it something as simple as a cup of coffee or buying a new car. He gradually began to realize that his envy was not enough and he needed to be more ruthless in order to get where he wanted to be. He became insensitive and apathetic towards fellow men who struggled to feed themselves every day, let alone work in professional jobs. He lacked concern for the world as he ploughed his way to the top. Money became his drug as he would feel warm inside when he saw how much he and his bank were making. Thousands became millions and millions became billions and he didn't have a worry about anything in the world. He would jog when work was finished to maintain his fitness and it provided a good feeling, freeing him from the stresses of work to the loneliness of the city and he enjoyed it as such. He rarely saw his brothers and sisters and rarely discussed them inside his circle of friends. He considered his farm life an embarrassment which must be kept quiet and so he formulated a new childhood about growing up in a rich family of wealthy business owners and was ushered through college.

There was no mention of his previous life of scrubbing dishes in the Bronx. His friends were now all confident bankers themselves and they would go out every Friday and Saturday with the cocaine flowing and endless drinks and they would visit hookers and enjoy the privileged existence. He found a woman who he could control and she was impressed by his status, as were her parents and they would meet each other three times a week and he would promise her the

world and of course she would buy into it because she knew that if she didn't take him, someone else would. Eventually, they got married and his real side became evident once the contract was signed. He transformed into the dominant personality that he believed he was and engaged in a reign of terror on his home. They stuck together and raised a family despite being in an unhappy marriage. "You are free to leave any time you want," he would say to his wife, knowing fully well she was in a bind and would not leave him. It was strange how he changed once he knew he owned the woman and the children. He felt like that king who has absolute power in the kingdom and is fully convinced he can do what he wishes.

So he worked hard and laboured in his high paid job and earned enough to purchase a condo in Florida where they would spend the summers drenched in the heat and humidity. It thus came as a great shock to the system when this little dot in the sky turned out to be a death sentence in disguise. Initially like many, The Narcissist dismissed the word of the scientists.

"What do they know?" he would ask of his children.

But gradually he came to realize as the speck of light on the horizon became bigger, that a great tragedy lay in wait. So greedy and self-centred was The Narcissist that he only considered his own loss and not the futures of his children and wife. He scrambled around the living room of his house desperately trying to come up with a plan, as millions were doing, to counter the imminent threat. He grew more and more angry and then would take out his anger on his children. The narcissist always blames external sources for his woes and never internalizes his anger. His children would ask what would they do as a family to which he had no reply. He was becoming puzzled and disoriented. The loss of his whole livelihood would be damning. He would lose it all. His house, his money, the wife and children would disappear. All his commodities and the life he had built up would vanish in a day. He grew angry at such a thought and vilified the scientists and engineers for not doing enough to rectify the situation. Many people became angry at the powers that be for their idleness. He met with colleagues on Wall Street and sought their views.

"All we can do is die," they would attest.

But there must be something he could do he thought. There must be some way of surviving. That is when he discovered the ships that were being launched from the Mojave Desert. He probed into the mechanics of the system that was

being conducted. He discovered that it was a last attempt to secure the future of man. They were sending ships into space, perhaps to mars or the moon in an attempt to maintain the existence of mankind. The more he learned the more he came to realize that this was the only hope he had to continue living. The goal of this project was to extend the life of man beyond the terminal date when the asteroid would hit. This involved constructing a new technology in the mother ships and sending them through space. Some were going to the neighbouring planets and others were just sent in any direction.

It was pure chance. It was akin to firing twenty darts at the board and just hoping one dart hits the bull's eye. The probability of a successful end was so low it was practically zero. It was understood that people of certain characteristics were needed to be sent to space and he decided to chance his arm and see if he would be accepted. He would have to leave his family behind and he did so without hesitation for The Narcissist was so self-centred and only thought about himself. So one day he said he was slipping out to go to the shop and he never returned and he never said goodbye to his family. He just got up and left his wife and children to fend for themselves through the inferno and he felt no guilt or remorse. He had packed a few clothes and filled the tank with diesel. He had taken as much money with him as he could take in the hope that the operation would accept it as a token of gratitude in order to be accepted.

"It was something I had to do," he would reassure himself as his children suffered.

His destination was the Mojave Desert with the intention being to get on one of those flights into the cold realms of space. He looked at the map and planned out his journey. He would have to navigate through The Gangs territory and that would carry a degree of danger with it. He purchased as many supplies as possible and filled up canisters with water and packed them into the back seat and boot. He gave the engine a seeing to, to make sure it was in good order mechanically. He drove through the gritty streets of the Bronx and headed south. The riots were just getting started. The army was trying to control order but the mob was getting angry. The highways were jammed with people in cars going anywhere or going nowhere. They thought that if they could just escape, that it would be alright. But it didn't matter where you went in life or what you did, one was as doomed as the other. They could not flee the terror; they could only accept it.

After days of driving without achieving great distance he managed to escape the pandemonium and was free at last to head to Arizona. The army was still commanding order but had weakened due in part to some soldiers giving up the fight and wanting to spend their last few months in the company of those they loved. The politician's appealed for calm but their pleas were ignored. The people had rebelled but rebelled far too much. Hoping for a peaceful end they had given birth to an intolerable demon. He was lucky that he got out of New York as quickly as he did, for The Gangs were just forming there and many who stayed behind were caught in their web. He looked one last time in his rear-view mirror at the great city and made his way on. He thought about his family and wondered were they safe? A flicker of guilt crossed his mind but he put it to sleep straight away. From New York he drove south to Maryland taking in the vast countryside and the cold snow weighed heavily on his car. He would stop and pick up supplies at abandoned shops. He would check any shop he saw for any food supplies or gas. Most contained some basic food commodities but few had gas, but he did get lucky with some country stations that people rarely visited. Gas was needed more than food he thought. He couldn't walk to Arizona for it was too far. It would have been foolish to try and hitch a ride for you could never know the intentions of those who gave you the lift. The public transport system was as good as dead, so he was dependent on gas to get him to where he wanted to go and getting gas proved to be as dangerous as it was difficult.

On one occasion he stopped by a seemingly defunct station to inspect the pumps for gas even though his tank was almost full. As he played around with the hose three men armed with shotguns appeared and asked him what he was doing. He quickly backed away and got back into his car and they just looked on casually. He drove off thinking about how he needed a gun to survive. So sure enough the next gun-shop he saw that appeared abandoned he stopped and carefully looked around inside. He had to be careful in that some people would steal your car if you left it lying around for too long. The gun shop was a mess. Bullets lay strewn along the floor and there were many hand guns on display. The heavier guns like the shotguns were all gone but he took a few hand guns and boxes of bullets and sped off. So whenever he saw a store or a station he would pull in just beyond the entrance, wait for a few minutes with his pistols loaded and when no one came he would get out and inspect the place.

Maryland was nice but cold especially in the winter. He drove carefully through Baltimore. Baltimore before the apocalypse was a dangerous city and now with all laws dead it was a city that was stricken with criminality. He kept to the highways and avoided people. Even the people who appeared injured were to be avoided. One time he was tricked. A group of people waved him down on the highway with the snow falling and the white clouds overhead. He manoeuvred closely to them without turning off the engine and he was lucky he didn't for they pulled out guns as soon as he was within range and proceeded to fire at him. He stepped on the gas and sped away as the shots rang out. He kept going until the city was no longer in his view. He saw bodies of gangs and rebels lining the roads. This was a pure Gangs territory so he had to be very careful. If he was caught, he would probably be tortured. Luckily for him when he first set off from New York the world was still in its transformation from one of order to chaos and thus The Gangs had not yet grown to full strength.

From Maryland he hit Virginia. He avoided Richmond and instead concentrated on the south west of the state. He would stop at random places to eat food and take a rest. He would look out at the nice countryside with the rain falling heavily and wonder how his family were doing. The canned beef was a delicacy given his hunger. He could only eat one can a day because he was worried about running out of supplies too quickly. He thought about how life had changed so much now from what he was used to. He normally would have driven a nice Mercedes into work, now he was driving a bullet ridden dirty Mercedes. He began to see the landscape changing as he drove through it. Anti-social behaviour became more prominent. Youths in pickup trucks drove erratically sometimes throwing petrol bombs. Guns were fired without warning but luckily he was driving so fast that they could not hit him. Fires blotted the highways. Sometimes he had to slow down to navigate through them. He saw people walking on the highways each way. He wondered what they were thinking and where they were going.

He just kept his focus and his foot on the accelerator for fear of being attacked. There was a long trip to Tennessee next but he avoided Nashville and Memphis although they were not generally thought of as dysfunctional cities that had been overrun with The Gangs. Using his worn-out map he sped through Tennessee like a train. It was somewhat similar to Virginia in terms of its countryside. He saw dead animals lying in fields and houses on fire. The smoke from burned houses filled the air like a dangerous fog. He stopped at a grocery

store in a small town to see if there were any supplies. Its windows were broken and it had been looted by others. Armed with his two pistols he carefully went inside and looked around the shelves and floor for any food. Packets of different kinds of food lay on the floor, some opened and some not. He found a crate of canned peas which would be beneficial and so he took them. He looked behind the counter to see if they had any guns he could take but there was nothing. The place was empty like most small towns. He assumed The Gangs had run everyone out of the town or maybe purged the town. There were quiet rumours that mass graves existed where many country folk had been grotesquely murdered and he thought maybe that The Gangs had done that here, although this didn't seem to be a gangs territory and so he packed in a few other food commodities and soldiered on and headed west towards the mighty Arkansas.

Arkansas was barren as he gripped the steering wheel firmly and took in its great flat countryside. He pulled down his window and let the cool air filter into his consciousness. It was hotter down here but not blazing hot. Everyone had immigrated to other frontiers, maybe out of boredom or maybe because they thought they could survive further north. The flat countryside was beautiful and the air was so fresh and the sunlight was a blessing although it took a lot out of him and he was drinking more water than usual. He pulled over at rivers to fill up his bottle. But that was dangerous for one didn't know if the water was contaminated or not. But he was going to be dead anyhow in a few months so contaminated water was irrelevant at this stage.

Texas was a long journey and one in which he encountered trouble. He was travelling alone on the highways when next thing he caught a glimpse of a truck in his rear view. It was an army truck which could only mean one thing: it was a Gangs truck. It looked like it was about a mile away but it was gaining on him very quickly. He put his foot down on the accelerator and upped his speed. Still though the truck would not disappear and so he pumped the gas even more. He was now travelling at one hundred and fifty miles per hour. The truck began to disappear and he relaxed after this anxious moment. He had to be careful. If The Gangs caught him he would be better off dead and had planned to kill himself if they captured him.

He breezed through Texas without further trouble. Its size was incredible and brought back memories of childhood. He wondered whether he should call into his old home from youth and he decided he would. He would have to take a detour. He wondered whether his mother and father were still there or had they

moved on or what had happened to them? He was in two minds as to whether he should call to his parent's house, for it would knock valuable seconds off his destination to the Mojave and he feared that he could lose out on a place if he didn't hurry up. But he decided he would, for it may be the last time he ever saw his childhood place of birth. So he reached the outskirts of his old town and passing through it brought home some fond memories of when he was young and when he played with his friends in the park on slides and how they would go into the sweet shop and sometimes steal sweets without the owner realizing. He saw his old school from which he had graduated from being a boy to a man and remembered the times he got in trouble with the school teachers for not doing his homework or for being cheeky in class.

It brought home so many memories of the friends he grew up with and they had promised to look out for each other till the end. Now they had all disappeared and the town was a bleak shadow of its former self. Where had everyone migrated to he wondered? Had The Gangs destroyed the village or had everyone just left? He stopped the car outside the pizza shop and took a stroll through the main street armed with his guns. He saw the grocery store to which his mother used take him shopping. He saw the arcade where they used to hang out on a Saturday trying to kill time. It was defunct now. Its windows were broken and its walls shattered. It brought back the vivid memories of his friends as they used walk down the town with the girls looking at them and they would be so engrossed in life and living that the uncertainties of the future never dawned on them. Now he stood there by himself wondering how life had suddenly transformed into this anarchic beast.

He couldn't find anyone. It was dead, much like himself. So he got into his car and continued through the forsaken town and carried on to his old home which was out in the country a few miles. He had lucid memories of the road as he made his way to his folk's house. The fields where he used play, the river where they would swim. He saw the pitch where they would play American Football after school. How it was so good to be young and to not have a worry in the world. Slowly but surely he made his way to his old home. He pulled up outside the driveway and looked in. It was empty. The front door was open and swinging in the wind. The tree branches jostled gently. The grass was green as the sunlight punched down upon the fields behind the house. He slowly got out of his car and looked around. His pistol was cocked and ready to be fired. Despite that he was home he was nervous, for he didn't know who would be

there if anyone. He made his way to the front gate and pushed it inwards. It gave out a rusty groan. He approached the front door with its white paint cracked and creased. It had been so long since he had set foot on his old house for he had ignored his parents when he moved to New York. He had not visited them in years because he was so high on the adrenaline that the city that never sleeps provided. He pushed in the door and looked in. It was in good shape. He called out to see if anyone was there but the place was dead as he ventured in further. He saw pictures of his childhood hanging off the walls and the memories hit him hard. He saw his parents and family as they posed for pictures when they were young. He moved towards the kitchen and remembered how his mother used make him dinner and they would all sit down and eat. He wondered how time had gone by so fast and that it all had disappeared so rapidly. Life is cruel. There was a note on the fridge.

“We are gone north. Maybe towards Canada. Love you all.”

It was signed by his mother. They must have drifted off a few weeks earlier when the going got tough. They could be anywhere now. They could be in Canada. They could be captured by The Gangs. They could be dead. He sat by the table and looked around and tried to remember his youth that he loved. For the first time he wondered whether he had wasted his life. Perhaps he should have stayed at home he thought. He thought about his wife and children and a hint of sadness overcame him. Maybe he should have lived a different life, as the front door swung in the gentle wind.

The Priest

He had devoted his life to a god he felt had betrayed him. In the final hours of mother Earth, he watched on from the spaceship as the fear and panic spread like wildfire on a warm day. The screen then lit up as the asteroid crashed in towards the Atlantic Ocean at such frightening speed and it was in this very moment that he began to question his faith.

“Is man a product of god or god a product of man?” he asked himself as the tsunamis swept around each side of the planet.

“Where is god?” he wondered time and time again.

His god had deserted him when he was most needed. God was supposed to carry those in turmoil; he was supposed to carry those who struggled to carry themselves. Instead God like The Priest sat at a high ground and watched the Earth burn to the ground. The fellow shipmates became angry at the ignorance of god. They became hostile when a priest who too was losing his faith could not find answers for the damning questions. He wondered now in the destruction of the Earth and the certain end to the human species whether the whole divine order was a debacle. It was a circus of blind faith which did not reward and certainly had turned its back on its patrons.

“Where is God?” he asked again of himself with the tears slowly falling from his eyes.

“Where is my life, my reward and my justice for a life spent in honour of the divine?”

He could not face the fact that God had abandoned his disciples. God had earned his many followers and had deserted them when needed the most. The priest had prayed and prayed for an end to the crisis and none was provided. Now the mountains crumbled, the trees collapsed, the rivers turned to molten lava and man cried. He cried and cried for redemption that was ignored.

“How could this be?” they demanded of The Priest.

He could not answer them for he had no answers anymore. He only had himself and his own loneliness and that is all that anyone really has. He lay seated in the ship gazing into the screen that beamed images from Earth via a satellite. He looked at the jungles, once home to such a variation of vegetation, now lay in ruin. The cities were falling apart. The flat farm lands were laden with debris

from the asteroid. He sat and he wondered how he had wasted his life believing something that was a lie. Was god just something man had manufactured or was he like the asteroid? Did he exist independent of man? He had now come to doubt it.

He had started out as a man who didn't know what he wanted from life. He wanted to live and to help others. He had gained a degree in medicine from a prestigious college and had set about building a career out of that. But he found it was too materialistic and all about achievement rather than enjoyment. Men were greedy he saw, even the doctors and the allure of the status of the doctor is why a lot of men became doctors. He saw his colleagues charging so much and dining in the expensive restaurants and this sickened him. They were pseudo-bankers in disguise he thought. So one faithful night he rang his parents and proclaimed that he was giving up the life of medicine in favour of becoming a priest. They were astounded and pleaded with him to remain as a general practitioner, but his mind was set. His parents themselves were successful doctors and had set up the medical centre so that he would take over in due course and this change of career had hit them hard. But he had to follow his heart and soul and they led him on a different path. He wanted to help people in his own time rather than for money. He set in motion the change and studied to become a devoted servant of God. He enjoyed it more and people would come to him for advice and he enjoyed meeting people purely out of friendship and not for money or gain. Poverty was of no issue and he would often say that he was poorer when wealthy than he was in actual poverty.

“There was much wealth to be found in the poverty and much poverty to be found in the wealth.”

“There was more to life,” he would say. It wasn't about gain or being the best or being better than your neighbour. It was about doing what you enjoy and enjoying what you do. For that reason alone, he gave up the professional life in favour of a more straight forward albeit less financially rewarding career. He went to study in a remote part of the country. The study was not about listening to others, but rather about listening to your own calling and your own will and the desire to help others. It was intent on spreading love and teaching men and women alike to love the world.

“If one loves life, then life will love you back.”

The world of God was spiritual and focussed on a one on one internal connection. It was about the one man finding freedom through his own being. People were too caught up in gain in life. They wanted everything and enough was never enough. He saw a diseased population who wanted more and when they had more they wanted even more. His school of thought emphasized the content nature that can be achieved from just becoming one with the world and it tried to teach that chasing the world was futile. Now he had murmurings of these thoughts before he entered the order and the order in turn unleashed a whole new world upon him and opened his eyes even further to the enslavement of men in the system we call life. He was ordained on a peaceful Sunday and returned to his community in Arizona and set about helping his fellow man to become better. The land had changed he had noticed since he had been a child. Neighbours no longer knew each other. Supermarket staff no longer smiled. Adolescents all chased popularity and not happiness.

“There are two ways to be happy he would often say. One is to hunt happiness. So the journey becomes about the finish and life itself becomes about gain. The person who gains the most becomes the “happiest” and those who lose must try again and try harder. The other way to be happy is to just be happy to be alive. It is to wake up every morning just to be happy to wake up. That is a happiness that cannot be taken from you.”

He would often preach this to those who came to church. To be happy one does not need more. They just need themselves to realize how fortunate they are to exist.

When a virus crisis hit western Africa he decided to use his gift of medicine and his love of the priesthood to help those in need. His parents thought he was mad and questioned his decision to venture into the realms of West Africa which carried such risk. But he was intent on going to this ravaged part of the world to care for the sick. Maybe it was guilt on his part. Maybe he had wanted to atone for a previous error and found that the only way of doing so was through helping others and spreading the good word. Anyhow he was compelled to help others for some reason or another and so against his parent’s wishes he travelled to the heart of the disease in Sierra Leone and went about his double duty as a priest and doctor. In Africa he was held in high regard because of his generosity in helping the poorest of the poor and sickest of the sick. It was a severely under nourished country with a deficient health service. He couldn’t believe how little the hospitals had. The machines were so old and basic and worn out from over

use. The beds were simple and not the complex artefacts that were found in the western hospitals. The facilities were lacking or fit to crumble. Walls appeared cracked, sanitation was poor and windows were dirty. It truly was a third world hospital and it gave him a greater appreciation for life.

The first thing he noticed when he got off the plane was the intense heat. Even with the Atlantic Ocean so close the heat was intense and the humidity and pressure attacked even the toughest of souls. There was no air conditioning also which was peculiar and the midday temperatures frequently became unbearable. Water was in short supply and the food was so basic. There was no luxury like in America. Overall he enjoyed the life of the poor in Sierra Leone. Nobody worried about money or relationships. It was all about surviving and being happy just to be alive and he adored this mentality. He took to his job like a soldier at war. Many died around him. Many were left to rot on the streets like dogs. The disease was lethal in Africa because of the poor facilities and not because it was dangerous. He remembered thinking to himself that had Sierra Leone the same facilities and money as the West many lives would have been saved. It was a disease of poverty.

This new life gave him a change of heart with regards man. People lived in poverty yet they were so happy to be alive. They had no money, yet they valued what they did own. He enjoyed this way of life. It was a life of so little that gave so much. He came to consider the westernised life of privilege and elitism as the work of the devil.

“How come people have so much but are unhappy?” he would ask himself.

He was sickened when he returned to America. It was just when he was finally finding himself in life that the disaster that was the asteroid entered the minds and souls of every living man, woman and child in the world. It was a hammer blow to him but he took to it. He decided he wanted to spend his last few months within Gods nature. So he would just walk wherever knowing fully well that no matter where he walked he was doomed anyhow. He was intent on living his final few months by himself like a Tibetan monk. He left the city to avoid the riots. He walked and walked and found his salvation in the dripping red dawn and the quiet moonlight. He just wanted to extend his solitude on this planet but he saw in the sky the cloud of pain that was coming towards him. He walked and walked until he could no longer walk.

He remembered how those living in less well-off countries had found such harmony in the simple things like drinking water or eating the most basic of food. These thoughts made him happy and he knew he could not be broken by the impending doom. So he made his way in any which way. He went through Texas and New Mexico with the heat rising and the purple air so thin and he saw so many great landscapes that he would never have even dreamed about. Sometimes he hopped on trains and sometimes he slept under bridges while the world disintegrated around him. On one occasion he was almost captured by The Gangs who would have murdered him or worst tortured him. He was hiding out in a forest when an army truck pulled up on the side of the highway. A few men from The Gangs jumped out of the back and searched around the flora whilst others got off to go to the toilet. The Priest kept on looking at them unsure of whether they were friends or foes. He decided to keep quiet for silence is often the safest bet. They were dressed in army gear and looked very serious. They rooted around and spoke and laughed with each other as they pointed their rifles in every direction. One individual, a big strong man with a beard fired a shot into the sky which echoed through the forest and he was reprimanded for doing so. Just then they brought out a blindfolded individual whose hands were tied and began pushing him around. He was not wearing any top and his pants were ragged and he was shoeless. They lined him up at the tree and told him to run. He looked kind of puzzled even with the white blindfold and he started to walk slowly into the forest towards The Priest. Suddenly a few shots rang out and The Priest dived behind a hump in the forest floor. When he looked up again the man was lying face down and in pain. Blood poured from his back. The Gangs had executed the individual. The Gangs then picked up their baggage and jumped on the back of the truck and moved on. The Priest was unsure of what to do. He looked around to make sure there were no more gang members and then slowly made his way towards the injured man. He was still alive but only barely. He looked like he was suffocating on his own blood. The priest removed the blindfold and looked into his eyes.

“I’m sorry,” the man said and then died.

The Priest was unsure what he meant. Was he just asking for forgiveness because he knew he would die? The Priest stayed for a while by the man and dug a shallow grave for him and rolled him in and prayed for him and that was all he could do. The moment left a lasting impression on The Priest. He had never seen such brutality and it was a measure of how far chaos had grown, to

see such monstrous killing of men in this anarchic world. He was shaken because of this and wandered for a while traumatised and questioning the nature of mankind.

With the sun rising he walked on and with the moon naked amongst the stars he continued and he thought he may find a camp in the southern part of this country where he could spend the last few weeks or days until the doomsday came. He would meet people going the opposite direction and wondered where they were going? There was no correct path on which to venture. One was doomed regardless of which way one went. He would gaze into the stars at night by himself wrapped up under a bush and wondered if he could escape it all. He gradually came to realize that man was alone in this world. He had entered the priesthood to help others and to meet others and to spread happiness and now he was faced with his own reflection in the frozen moonlight and the sands of time were running so thin. He continued on passing people coming and going. He sometimes stopped to talk but man had become inhospitable in this current climate and the common politeness had all but dried up.

“Where are you going?” he would ask a family.

“Anywhere!” they replied.

“I hope it’s good,” said The Priest enthusiastically.

It was a similar story with everyone he met. The world in its angst had become directionless. It was a rudderless ship sailing the oceans carried by the prevailing wind of that time and whichever way the wind was blowing the ship and life went that way. So he just kept going and going. He would drink water from rivers and regularly topped up a flask he had. Food was scarce but he would pick fruit from trees or maybe be given a portion of bread and soup by a family. It was when he encountered the Mojave Desert that his life would take an unsuspecting turn for he had resigned his fate and was prepared to meet his maker.

The Mojave was unbearable given how hot it was. Those who went in rarely came out especially if you were walking and only carrying a flask with half a day’s water. He decided to test himself like Jesus did so many years ago when he ventured into the desert. He was going nowhere and yet he was going everywhere and he was not bothered at all.

“Perhaps I am mad,” he would say to himself as he wandered the highways as cars flew by. The heat was intense and the humidity would make even the sternest man cry.

“Where to now,” he would ask, as he would wander for miles and the thirst began to attack his physique.

His mouth grew very dry and his muscles began to weaken under the stress. Eventually he had to stop and rest under the shade but there was no water and no people. He was unsure of what to do now. Should he stay where he was and travel during the night or should he continue walking and hope for the best? That was all he had now, hope and it is such a dangerous thing. Hope can be a mirage, a false dawn. It was the same hope that millions others ascribed to with the asteroid firing towards them. As he sat there he wondered about all the people who are suffering right now and all of Gods creatures who were suffering and it made him sad and with his dehydration he too began to suffer and see into the lives of those who were sick or dying of thirst. He wondered about the poor dogs who were trapped in cages in the dead heat without water and who perished in such awful conditions and he wished to apologise to God for man treating the poor dogs like this.

“Man is the cruellest animal of all. Man is the cancer upon this world and I for one am kind of glad that he will disappear,” he said to himself.

He was resting in the Mojave by a rock with the scorching sun beaming down and the air so light that he began to give in to God and the will of the universe. He knew now he had come too far. He had ventured too deep into the hot abyss and that no matter which way he went he would soon collapse from the heat or the thirst. He gazed up at the blue sky and thought about how such brutal conditions gave birth to such beautiful scenes.

“Maybe the world needs to be reset,” he thought to himself.

“Maybe the world needs to be destroyed and be reborn much purer.”

Maybe this asteroid was an act of God who was determined to give Earth a new chance without man and his infectious mentality. He became convinced by this thought. Perhaps the world was set to shed its skin and start again. But would man rise up from the ashes or would a new species be spawned? He wondered about that as he looked around at the glorious mountains and the yellow glistening sand. It was in that moment when all hope seemed vanquished that a

ray of light appeared on the horizon. It looked like a ship blasting off and then he heard a piercing roar of an engine, like a thunder storm. He got to his feet and peered further into the view. Yes, he could see a ship, a rocket blasting off from Earth. He had heard about some project that was underway in the Mojave, that was designed to keep man alive but was not interested then. But the curiosity and bewilderment of seeing the ship rise into the atmosphere had taken a hold of his emotions. He set about gaining a closer look at the goings of this huge laboratory and started walking towards the source of the ship.

It was a huge facility guarded by army personnel. He could see a high fence surrounded the perimeter and there were watch towers every fifty meters or so. People lay dead outside the perimeter. They had been shot by the guards for probably trying to gain entry into the complex. Their rotting corpses lay slumped on the sand. He could see five huge stainless steel warehouses and a launching pad further out where the ships took off. They were very tall the warehouses and looked like manufacturing houses for the ships. He stayed back out of fear of being shot at and lay behind a rock. Although the heat was still raging, he did not notice it as much now because he was so entranced by the whole factory. He observed people talking to each other in groups of three or four. Some stood outside a warehouse smoking. They looked like normal folks. They were dressed in normal clothing that was dirty. There were no uniformed people except the army guards that haunted the perimeter. Cars moved around in patterns following the yellow lines imprinted on the concrete ground. He could see inside one of the warehouses. It housed a space rocket that was being prepared to be moved to the launch pad. It was like an aeroplane but without the long wings. The place looked hectic from what he could gather, people were running around and in constant conversation. Trucks moved in and out of the fortress carrying goods and raw materials. Helicopters manoeuvred overhead in the glistening sunlight. Army personnel could be seen chatting to each other. They looked like generals. The heat must have been killing them in those military uniforms. He wondered how he would get into such a huge place. It had caught his attention. What was going on inside this factory? He was no longer resigned to just letting the world slip by and accepting his fate. He had a newfound enthusiasm for life.

Some months previously he had heard the murmurs about space and was not interested, but now his attention was captured. He saw these mighty feats of engineering rushing towards the atmosphere and he yearned to be on one. He

longed to see the world from the eyes of the universe. But how would he get in? He had noticed earlier a bus travelling with people that was let in the main gate by the soldiers. Perhaps if he could get on that bus he would have a chance. He sat and pondered for a while as the great big rockets launched before his eyes. The thunder was deafening and the anticipation was glorious. He sat and looked up at the great sky as night settled in and the stars began to reveal their faces and he wondered about travelling to another star and starting life again. He saw himself living his life again and doing it all differently. He saw his family and his brothers and sisters all sitting down at a table like they used to do when young and enjoying each other's company. They used to play in the garden behind their house. How life goes by so fast he thought. He then looked at the moon and saw his reflection in it. How far he had come and he wondered how this great existence would end?

The Existential Nihilist

She was in love with the destruction. She was one of the very few who did not feel the fear of the anarchic world. She accepted the decision handed down by God and got on with her life. For this reason alone, she was chosen for the ship. She was different and it couldn't be put any simpler. From an early age she did not socialize as her peers did. When they all rushed together to talk and play with toys, she remained alone and by herself in the corner. School was tough for this reason. She was a social outcast as determined by her classmates. They would laugh and demean her. She was forced by her parents to socialise and attend social events she did not like. So she would be led to the gallows of parties and family affairs by her parents even though she had a sharp distain for meeting people. As a child she became immersed in philosophy whilst at the same time the pressure to conform weighed heavily on her shoulders, for her parents had high hopes for her when she grew up. So on one hand she found comfort in her own solitude whilst she then had to try and fit in during the social scene. Books were much simpler she would often say later on. They did not judge you or demand to be entertained by you. Books just let you be and thus she escaped into her own dream world where life was much simpler, devoid of the irrational nature of men.

From school she progressed to high school where she fitted in better and became more social but she was bullied for her strange off putting demeanour. Teachers found her cold and quiet. Sometimes she wouldn't even say hello to fellow class mates or teachers and they were left wondering about her personality. She made a few friends in high school but never put much effort into friendship and thus lost all her friends when she moved to college. This cycle would repeat itself throughout her life. She would move to a new area and make new friends. Everything would go smoothly for a while. Then she would get fed up with this life and the friends would become too demanding or they would come to know her too much and she would have to move again. She would change her name so as they could not fully know her. She feared being known. To be known was to be condemned she would say.

“When a person knows you they label you and when they label you, they destroy you,” she thought.

So she would avoid this existential threat by avoiding people and when she did have to meet people she would use an alias so that they could not fully identify her. She had a huge distrust of people in general that came from being bullied in

her childhood. People were out to get her in some way or form she would attest and they could not be trusted. Her fear of people was that they would swallow her up, that they could see into her tarnished soul and observe all her weaknesses and desires and this made her anxious. The eyes of people became very fearsome and if the world was blind she would have no anxieties. So she would keep moving from area to area and with America being so big it was never a problem. So all her friends from high school and from college had been forgotten.

In college she found a new release from life. She could attend lectures whenever she felt like it and often skipped whole weeks because she couldn't be bothered. She tried fitting in with her college associates as her parents wanted her to, but again the old failings would come back to haunt her. She couldn't understand why people wanted to socialize. It was a disease to her. What made people laugh and cry she would wonder and why couldn't she do it? People were so happy with themselves and they were all the same. Why did they all want to work and get married? Her life was one of observation and not action. She would analyse people rather than engage with them, to the point that the spontaneity of life that is generally a necessity was missing for her. She did not have the supreme social skills that are unconsciously demanded by people in conversation. For example, someone may say:

“The weather is good today,”

To which a normal person would respond by starting a conversation. Alas she would just respond with “yes,” or “maybe.” She was emotionally flat and did not reciprocate warmth to those she encountered. She often avoided eye contact and would stay clear of places where she knew people whom she was acquainted with were there.

Her appearance was ragged unlike most of her peers, who paid attention to their looks and tried to be as attractive as possible. She had no interest in being as attractive as she could be. Many lives were wasted on trying to be better she would say. So she would wear the same clothes for many days without changing or washing them. Her college mates considered her abnormal as did her nearest relations. She did not buy into the whole standard of life by which people are supposed to live. Her life was about looking at life, at the stars and wondering why on Earth we all exist. Her days were spent in a fantasy world of psychology and philosophy. She would pour herself into these disciplines and would spend

hours and many nights dreaming of the existential nature of man and what life meant. She spent so much time thinking about life that she failed to live.

Her parents were not impressed when she decided to change her studies from accountancy in favour of becoming a writer. They had pumped a lot of money into her studies and were left bewildered by her new path which they saw as unpredictable with little promise. But she would get anxious around people and she felt a life of solitude was the only option. So after flirting with accountancy she did a U-turn and left college after one year and she was glad she did. She had a low tolerance of people. She could never work in the professional environment where so much is demanded of someone interpersonally. The workers have to be many things. They must be educated, funny and caring. She was educated but not funny and definitely not caring. She lacked empathy towards her fellow man. She didn't care about their lives. If they were having relationship problems or their parents were dying she did not offer empathy. Such a person will always fail in society for society demands that people empathize with each other.

She had a love of animals though. Dogs in particular were very special to her. They did not talk and gave unconditional love. They were predictable and did not judge her like her fellow human beings did. When she looked into the eyes of a dog she saw friendship. When she looked into the eyes of another human being she saw judgement. She had planned to become a writer but if doing it was one thing, succeeding was another. Writing afforded her solitude which she craved. Solitude was her friend, her only true friend and she could not cheat it. The world was too antagonistic she came to believe. Her daily life was a turmoil that was centred around a psychological game theory. The people she met, were they friends or foe? Did they like her or did they dislike her? This was the battle that raged in her mind whenever she encountered someone else. Given her tendency towards anxiety it was probably better that she left the professional environment.

So she turned to the freedom of loneliness and began to write. Initially she was unsure of what to write about but eventually she found her passion in existential philosophy. She wasn't interested in living but she was interested in why people live and this became the theme of her notes. She branched out of fiction to philosophical fiction along the lines of Robert M Pirsig's: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. She enjoyed writing about the engineering of life and the mechanics of the mind. Why did people live the same lives she would often

say? Simone De Beauvoir was a huge influence on her style. Given that De Beauvoir was one of only a handful of female existentialists, she read through her notes frenetically. She had aspirations to be the next female existential writer but if dreaming was easy, reaching your dreams was a lot tougher.

With the aid of her parents she moved into a derelict house in the country side in Oklahoma and concentrated on living the simple life, funded by her parent's money of course. Her life was so simple. She would get up at ten in the morning and have a cup of coffee. She then would set the fire for the day and then take to her writing as the fire lit up. After perhaps two hours of writing she would stop and eat a meal. She then would have another cup of coffee and start writing again. She would finish writing for the day and have her dinner and then relax and watch the stars come out at night. She had no television and no internet. It was a simple life she would say and she loved it this way. She was completely frozen in the countryside away from society. Her parents would bring her food and water every Saturday to keep her in good health and they would try to pull her back to the real world but she resisted their demands. The real world was full of stress she would think. It was all about money and achievement. There was no freedom in such a capitalist economy where your neighbours were your enemies. She had purged herself of everything associated with the American Dream. She just wanted to be happy by herself and not dependent on others for her happiness.

Her life was much easier now. All she had to worry about was food and heat. She was just settling in to this warm solitude when the news of the asteroid took hold. Initially she was in denial of whether it would actually hit, let alone wipe out mankind. But eventually she let reason rule her emotion and began to accept the realities of the situation. She was a bit sad because of it, for she was just coming into her own, living in this pervasive solitude and she now calculated she only had a couple of years left before it all turned into a nightmare. Initially she was unsure of what path to take. Should she remain where she was or move back home to the parents? She decided to spend time with her parents.

So she moved back in with her parents and they spent some time together looking at the sky and this small object that was to cause so much pain. Around this time law and order began to break down and The Gangs took control of the place when the army was dismantled. Life suddenly became much harder for her although she grew into the panic better than most. In fact, she revelled in this anarchic world where money and jobs perished and violence and a struggle

came to the fore. She actually found it easier to live in this world in contrast to the previous one for in this world people had no friends and it was every man or woman for themselves. So as The Gangs took control of her town and instigated a reign of terror, she joined The Rebels and became a scout. She was fearless unlike her fellow rebels and was held in high esteem by the commanders. She was very strong mentally. Regardless of what she did or how she did it, she was destined to die anyhow, so she may as well negate any anxiety she had. She was peculiar The Rebels would note. She kept to herself at all times and rarely spoke to others and yet if they were looking for volunteers to scout or even raid a gang's territory she would be the first signed up. So she would sneak into the enemy territory and take count of how many there were and where they were.

On one occasion she was asked to impersonate a gang member which she duly did without hesitation. The Rebels had received intelligence that a gang member had infiltrated their group. This spy was lurking in amongst The Rebels and relaying vital information on to The Gangs. She was tasked by the leaders to find out who this was. This meant she had to pretend to be an agent of The Gangs herself and try and decipher who among the group of rebels was the spy. So she would give the signals that she was an agent by slipping off from meetings and pretending to relay information to The Gangs. The spy began to notice this behaviour and befriended her out of a common interest. Eventually through gaining the trust of this member she uncovered the tangled web of deceit and the spy was executed on the spot.

One day The Rebels received news that a huge company in Arizona was looking for volunteers for an experiment. It involved being sent to space to try and prolong man's life. They were looking for tough individuals. The Existential Nihilist initially dismissed this as farfetched and possibly the work of The Gangs to lure unsuspecting rebels to their deaths. But it turned out that the information was correct and that they were looking for subjects who would be sent into space. The more she heard about it, the more her mind became entranced. She had always been hooked on space and when young would spend nights looking at the stars and the moon wondering what it would be like to see Earth from a different perspective. So she thought about it intensely. Her choice was either stay where she was now and meet a certain painful death or sign up for the experiment, hope that she got selected and to prolong the inevitable. She delved deep into her heart to see what she wanted to do. She came to the conclusion that this was what she needed to do with her life. She needed to

escape the planet, The Gangs and the horror that would unfold in the coming weeks and months with the asteroid. She needed to move again and restart the whole movement like she used to do when things were calm. She had grown to know her fellow rebels too much and yearned to lose herself in another dose of anonymity. By going into orbit she could escape herself once more. She could leave her mistakes and her fears behind and try and start again in a new environment.

So she packed her bags and made her way down to Oklahoma City where a meet up point was designated. Luckily for her she was only an hour's drive away from the city. The bus stop was outside a run-down police barracks. There were army personnel there, armed with assault rifles to guard against the attacks by The Gangs. There was a group of twelve waiting to be picked up and transported to this laboratory in the Mojave Desert. They chatted amongst themselves although The Existential Nihilist kept to herself and avoided conversing with others. The bus arrived as she took one last look at the city in which she had grown up, knowing fully well that this could be the last time she saw its passive streets and vibrant buildings. She looked around her and kissed the air and thanked the city for being her friend and boarded the bus and looked forward to the next chapter in what would probably turn out to be a short life.

So she was taken to the huge complex and brought in beyond the steel gates to this massive operation. Each volunteer was given a few basic supplies and a bunk on which to sleep with others in a dorm. They were told on their first night that they would be spoken to at the next sunlight about the whole operation and what was intended to happen. They went to sleep that night thinking about whether they would be chosen. Next morning, they were awoken early as three doctors with white coats entered the dorm and began observing them. They were given blue clothing to wear at all times and were told to leave their original clothes by their bunk. The doctors would follow them around at all times making notes on behaviour and response to the environment. The volunteers were transferred to a dining area to have breakfast which consisted of basic porridge and juice. The volunteers were initially afraid to speak to one another but gradually they began to converse with the doctors watching on. The Existential Nihilist sat by herself and deferred from conversing with her fellow subjects and instead concentrated on eating and surveying the area.

When they were finished eating breakfast they remained seated as another doctor took to the stage and began to give a talk on the situation and where it

would go from here. He told the volunteers that most would be sent home again and only a few would have what it takes to be chosen to go into space. He also made reference to the gravity of what they were about to undertake if they were chosen, that many people had died on route to space or actually in space due to faults in ships and so on. The volunteers were then escorted to a new area where interviews would take place. They sat out in a small transparent room and looked in at the doctors interviewing the volunteers. It was a simple one on one conversation to build up a personality profile of the volunteers and to discern whether they were suitable candidates to be sent into space. The scientists were impressed by the mentality of The Existential Nihilist for she showed a mental strength and wanted to survive and they knew she would hold out for as long as possible. They had concluded that she was remote, and distant and stand-offish and these were qualities they were looking for. They were not looking for people who possessed normal emotions for normality meant that space would be too much, as previous ships that ventured into space had shown. One of the traits that they looked for was the ability to survive by oneself. Were they dependent on conversation to gain peace? Were they emotionally scarred by what they observed in life? Was happiness material or internal? The individual they were looking for had to be lifeless and able to cope with the harshness of life. The Existential Nihilist ticked all these boxes. She was cold and seemed to lack a warmth towards her fellow human being. The doctors liked this for it meant that she would not go psychotic while in space with the vacuum pressurizing the walls of the ship and the eternal nothingness just inches away. She thus excelled at the mental tests that tested her strength. In a white room with a camera rolling and a psychiatrist writing down notes opposite her, they would interrogate her and ask her many questions regarding her life and her mentality.

“What is your opinion on existence?”

“We are born, we live, we die and we are forgotten,” she responded.

“What do you think will become of this trip to space?”

“We will all die as will everyone on Earth.”

“And this does not fill you with apprehension?”

“You can either worry or accept your worry and try to enjoy the last few days of existence.”

“What would you do if a volunteer in space goes psychotic?”

“Kill him maybe,” she said.

“Why?”

“Because he threatens to destroy the whole experiment and one life means nothing.”

“But if you are going to die anyhow, surely it is redundant?”

“True, but I want to live as long as I can.”

In the physical tests she didn't do as well. She was made run in a swimming pool with the viscous water pushing against her or to climb a cliff face to measure her stamina which fared poorly in comparison to other volunteers. But fitness was only one aspect by which they measured an individual. They also looked at her physical health and determined she was in a good condition. People who had serious ailments like diabetes, poor sight or poor hearing for instance were immediately rejected for the trip to space. She ticked most boxes and they were extremely impressed by her mentality. Her coldness and emotional flatness was exactly what they were looking for as a test subject to be sent into space. They needed people who would not get anxious. They needed people who were emotionally cold and did not view the world in terms of love and friendship. They needed people who saw the realities of existence and she with her knowledge of philosophy certainly saw life for what it was.

After the interview and the physical tests, the volunteers were sent back to their dorms and told to rest and be calm. The following morning a list of names was read out and those names were told to pack their belongings and follow the army sergeant. The Existential Nihilist was not one of the names called and initially she feared that she had been rejected. But it turned out those who were called out were led to the bus and returned to where they had been collected. Those who had not been called out were chosen for the trip and they rejoiced as much as they felt anxious. Was it a good or bad thing they wondered? Only time would tell. She was thus trained up for the journey to the darkness of the universe. She sometimes thought of what she had left behind but managed to keep the flickers of guilt to a minimum. The training was rigorous but she persisted and prepared herself to leave the boundaries of Earth and find solace beneath the stars. She was mentally prepared and now she had to be physically prepared. She had to become aware of the environment in space with its zero

gravity and its strange conditions. She was trained on how to eat and how to drink, how to sleep and how to go to the toilet. She was thus set up for a short life among the stars and she would never set foot on Earth again.

The Scientist

She was lucky in that she was a chosen one. That she loved science and chose to work on rocket engineering had meant that she stood a high chance of being chosen for the trip. If she hadn't been a scientist she surely would have been ignored. Each ship needed a captain or a chief engineer that knew how to command the ship as well as sort out the technical problems. Given the shortage of scientists at the laboratory, the scientists they had were trained to keep an eye on a range of things from the electronics of the ship to the engine, the heating and oxygen supplies. The dice had rolled in her favour. From youth she had always wanted to be a scientist. She had spent her childhood gazing at the yellow moon wondering what it would be like to visit. She had looked at the milky stars and dreamed of life beyond Earth where someday mankind would be able to launch its aspirations towards those glowing stars. She found her passion from an early age and knew that it lay in space.

She excelled at maths and physics and regularly outscored her classmates in the school tests. She was by no means a genius at these subjects but she certainly had talent and the desire to achieve and become an aerospace engineer. Her heart was set on this dream and her parents supported her the whole way through and they were delighted that she was pursuing such a career. So she made her way up through high school in California and gained entry into Caltech college to study her chosen field in more detail. She was now a beautiful young woman with long dark hair and a pale complexion. The boys had gradually started to take notice of her good looks but she had defied their attention on her parent's orders. Her mind was more focussed on her career rather than her love life and she poured herself into her passion. She was always amazed at the machines that could traverse the skies and defy the laws of gravity to reach the outer atmosphere and settle in the calm orbit. She would build her own rockets out of bottles and use chemical reactions to power them fifty yards into the sky and she would watch them come falling down and crash into the grass.

Caltech college was far more competitive than school was. In college she was pitted against fellow would-be engineers and scientists who all wanted to be the best in the class. She found it much more serious than school. In school it was all about having fun and enjoying the humour of the other class mates as they grew up and tried to make a name for themselves in life. But at that age the demands of life are in the back of the mind and life is easy. The parents pay for

everything and one can feel the sense of calm that is associated with being young. With the coming of college this disappeared. There was more emphasis placed on the individual to make a name and a life for him or herself. Of course most grow into such a role and become mature individuals but some cannot handle the weight of the expectation and succumb to the pressures that are put on them. The Scientist did feel the social pressures but managed to put them into the back of her mind and she concentrated on her studies which kept the demons at bay. The course was tough and the standard was so high given the level of students that enrolled there. They made each other better and those who couldn't hack it were left behind.

It was around this time that she met a man with whom she fell in love. During school she had neglected this part of her life to further her studies and make sure she got into the college of her choice. Now that she was in and surviving the stress, she turned to the area of her life that had been left unfulfilled. A young man who was studying mechanical engineering managed to sweep her off her feet and she fell hopelessly in love with him. He was the same age as her and he too had come from a similar predicament in that he had spent his youth studying rather than living. So they would meet up for coffee every day and talk to each other and look out for each other in the clearest way possible. From talking they went on dates to the cinema. They both had a passion for cinema and they saw 2001: A Space Odyssey together for the first time and they spent the evening talking about what they had seen and what it meant.

"What was the meaning of the man at the end?" The Scientist would ask and her boyfriend was stuck for words. "What was the meaning of the whole film," he would counter and she was stuck for words and because they were so stuck for understanding they went back in and watched the film again to try and make sense of it. It had a particular interest for her given that it dealt with themes about space and the quest of man to expand his horizons and reach other planets.

"Do you ever wonder what lies beyond space?" she asked him one day. "Our thoughts reach a wall when we dream. We think of ourselves, our town, our country, planet, galaxy and then the universe. But what lies beyond the universe I wonder. Is it like 2001: A Space Odyssey, a man sitting in a room eating? Or is there more beyond our imagination?"

"I don't know. Perhaps no one knows," he responded.

“Maybe only god.”

“And I’d say he is unsure himself.”

They laughed together at this assertion. With time running thin and the asteroid approaching so fast, they began to enjoy each other so much more. When the asteroid was first observed, they had initially dismissed its potential damage like many did and it was only when they saw it in the night sky that they accepted its fate. They would meet more often now in college, intent on spending whatever time was left together in good spirits. For some reason now with the threads of time ever so weak everything became much warmer. They began to appreciate life more now that it was facing a certain demise. Friendship was valued more highly; food was cherished; the laughs and the love were never enough. They would sometimes on a clear night sit out at the balcony with bottles of beer and look at the stars and the asteroid and enjoy each other’s company, knowing full well that by this time in three years the world would be a forsaken place. Love conquers all they say and yet it could not match the might of the asteroid. Its strength was overpowering; its will was final. She found it sad that she was just graduating and beginning a new chapter in her life and all the pieces seemed to be falling into place when the awful news of Earth’s destiny struck like a bolt of lightning. She had wanted to settle down and have children. She had like millions of others, so much living to do and so little time to do it. She prioritised her family and her boyfriend before everything else.

So she would spend more time with her parents and siblings and also with her boyfriend and would enjoy this time together. Before, she was convinced that she would live forever and therefore ignored the simple things in life such as being polite and thankful for existing in the first place. She had observed how in pursuit of a career she had forgotten to spend time with those she loved and who returned her love. So now she returned to her town of birth and spent the remaining few weeks and days with her family. They would greet each morning with a smile and many would get up early and go to bed late so they could enjoy the last moments of life just a bit longer. The coffee became smoother; the hardships became easier and the food tasted finer.

Nothing had changed in actual fact except for their perception. Previously they had everything and took it for granted but now they appreciated the simple things in life. Luckily for them The Gangs had avoided the west of America and had taken up residence mainly in the east and south east. There were a few

gangs in California but not near enough to cause trouble. A number had migrated to the east to join up with other gangs. This enabled The Scientist and her family to enjoy the final few moments of mankind's long history. Having said that, they did sleep with the guns cocked and loaded just in case, as the law and order had diminished and a few anti-social individuals decided to take the law into their own hands and go on the rampage. But these were single events and lacking the sophistication with which actual gangs operated.

So with this relatively peaceful existence they could enjoy the remaining period of their lives. They grew vegetables in their garden and harvested the grain for bread and they became self-sufficient. They had stocked up on meat and alcohol. They would often think about how many millions of years it took for man to evolve and how that he would be wiped out in a matter of weeks if not days. Such a long time to build an empire that would perish in such pain and so quickly. Such fine margins they would say for if the asteroid was travelling at a slower speed or a five percent different angle it would not cause the damage it was predicted to cause. "If only," they would say, "if only."

She had heard through murmurings of a great project that was underway in the Mojave Desert. Her college lecturer had mentioned that they were conducting a huge experiment in the desert to see if life could be maintained, if only for a slightly longer period. They were looking for scientists and engineers who could work on the ship and they were also looking for engineers who could command the ships into space and hopefully to a new dawn. The Scientist was frozen between choice. On the one hand she had wanted to spend the last remaining days with her true love and best friend; on the other hand she saw this opportunity as a chance to see space once and for all, something she had yearned to do since she was a child. So she would gaze into the skies at night and look into her boyfriend's eyes and had to decide between the two. Her boyfriend was supportive when she told him that she wanted to go to space. He wanted her to be happy and she had wanted to bring him with her but he couldn't leave his family behind. There was something about the coldness of the solar system that lit a fuse in her mind and she pursued the dream with fervour.

When she arrived at the camp she was immediately tested as per usual to see if her mentality was suitable. She received word the next day that she was of the correct psychological mentality to be selected. Next, the powers that be decided that given her background in engineering and science that she would be suitable for the position of an engineer or a scientist on one of the voyages. She was as

nervous as she was thrilled with this selection. It meant that she would be the captain of the ship as it departed for space but it also meant she had more responsibility than the other members of the ship. She was trained in every facet of leadership that they could think of. She was taught about how to control the ship in space, the electronics of the ship, the fuel, the heat and oxygen, the food supplies, how to administer the medicine and much more. She would be the supreme commander of the ship.

To prepare her for the rigours of space she had to engage in underwater training which would mimic the effects of the zero gravity. This was done in case repairs needed to be carried out on the outside of the ship. She was overjoyed but she was nervous about venturing into the depths of space, where so few men had gone. Before she was destined to be launched into the confines of the universe she gave one last phone call to her family and her boyfriend. She still had a chance to change her mind and return home and be with those whom she loved but they convinced her that this was for the best. She spent an hour on the phone with her parents before she said a tearful final goodbye and she thanked her mother and father for raising her and being the best parents they could be. She then rang her boyfriend and he wished her good luck and hoped they would meet again in another world and that was it.

They were suddenly gone and she was all alone in the world. The next day at six hundred hours in the morning the ship carrying four members was launched into the blue skies of Earth and towards a new dawn. It took off and hit the outer atmosphere without any trouble. It then liaised with a larger mother ship in the solar system and so the journey began. Its destination was a designated worm-hole that lay in the solar system. They then were instructed to go through that and to find a hospitable planet which they were to “conquer”. “Try and find life,” was the instruction that was handed down from the superiors. If not life, then try and find a new home where you can live. It was more hope than science. They did not know what lay beyond the worm-hole. They were hoping a rich fertile planet was at the end of this nihilistic rainbow.

Tears in Rain: The Beach

So time's arrow was fired and it floated across the horizon, as the trio succumbed to a life of failure and boredom. They had to move into a one bedroomed apartment in which they shared the rent. Of course, Sibéal being the woman got the room and Brian and Sean purchased two mattresses and slept in the kitchen, with ambulance and police sirens keeping them awake most nights. This new neighbourhood was a forsaken mineshaft in comparison to where they originally were. The rent was cheap but for a reason. There were drug addicts and prostitutes everywhere. On one occasion their apartment was broken into and smashed, but the robbers didn't take anything, for there was nothing to take other than the mattresses. There was no cooker or television or even fridge. They had nothing and were forced to buy cooked meals. As it became bleaker they took to the homeless shelters and availed of the free food there. They did what the Irish usually do in tough times, laugh, drink and smoke and try to forget ones troubles and hope they forget you.

Brian was still stuck on the back of a skip truck in the early mornings with the icy wind piercing his fingers. Sibéal was fired from her initial waitressing job for not turning up, partly due to the auditions she was attending. She was drifting from job to job and was now currently employed as a secretary for a taxi cab firm. Sean was his usual self, not worrying and not getting too excited either. He found the furniture removal business quite easy and would be content to do it for the rest of his life. They would struggle for meals and would buy the cheapest commodities, usually in bulk and then they would make sure they had lots of coffee and cigarettes to kill the hunger. Soup was the favourite and they managed to get their hands on a big packet of porridge that kept them warm in the cool nights.

They were laughable at the moment. They were a million miles from where they had dreamed they would be. Life is not what you dream, but rather how you live as you dream. They did not understand this harsh concept. They were still drunk on delusion and there are none more blind than those who refuse to see. They became acquainted with the new neighbours and so began the repetition of the last life they lived in the original apartment. They would party and run their lives ragged and their finances would seep into a hole of quicksand and before they knew it they were broke and starving again for the weekend. Sean was then depended on to provide the fuel to quench their hunger, because he was cautious

with how he spent his money, whereas Brian and Sibéal would throw it around without thought, although Sibéal was a bit smarter with where she put it.

One night as Sean was walking home from the shop carrying a loaf of bread and cans of tuna, he was met by three tough men who stopped him and demanded he give them his money. Sean being who he was did not panic. "I am Irish and have no money," he replied. They looked at each other and then attacked him violently on the spot. He was knocked to the ground as they kicked at him and hit him. They continued the assault for a minute or so, although it is hard to count time when you are being attacked. They reached in for his wallet but could not find it as he had no wallet. They pulled out a few coins and ran off. Sean got up and relaxed himself and watched on as they ran off into the distance. He tidied his clothes and felt the cut on his lip. He was not alarmed or panicked, for what could the three men do to him? Beat him up. He was already beaten up by Hollywood. Kill him? He had died many years ago. He picked up his groceries and proceeded on home. When Sibéal and Brian saw him and enquired as to what happened, he just said he had tripped. The funny thing was they believed him.

Every night in the flamed heat of the summer they sat in their apartment, with the succulent calm light flowing in from a setting sun and contemplated their lives and lack of success. They smiled and chuckled and questioned life and living itself. The whiskey and vodka would flow from the bottles like fountains and they gazed into each other's eyes, never wondering how good it was to be young and alive. One night in the midst of all this ecstasy, a small fire started in the apartment that caused chaos and initial panic. But Brian ripped off his t-shirt and extinguished it like a professional. One of the ragged mattresses was badly burnt and they had no replacement. It meant Sean and Brian every second night each slept on the burnt mattress that was tarred and melted. What could they do! It was better than sleeping on the floor.

The parties were regularly attended, but they were beginning to see that they were a waste of time and energy. They never achieved anything of note from them. I suppose you have to go out to enjoy yourself in life, not to make a killing and when you try too hard to force the issue, people tend not to appreciate it, even though you are trying. Added to the fact that some parties were dangerous and laden with heavy drinking and serious drugs and brawls broke out and young peoples' faces were cut and futures occasionally shattered. They would take trips into the shopping heart of LA a lot and just scavenge

through the streets and shopping malls, wondering if life was only different and they had money to buy things. The lads were prone to wearing the same clothes for indefinite periods of time and the sweat and stains were evidently visible on their t-shirts. Sibéal, thankfully, was hygienic and had prepared before she had touched down on foreign soil, with four big suitcases of clothes that she kept folded and immaculately clean. She then purchased a cheap perfume that did the trick. The heat was sensational in LA during the summer and really beat down on the landscape. At night, it was especially heavy and humid and difficult to breathe. The windows were left open wide, no doubt attracting the attention of burglars, but then again there was nothing to rob except their dignity and possibly their lives.

As time frittered by, the desperation began to settle in, and the lack of success within Hollywood and its scene endeavoured to make the three members seek other paths to success. Sean began writing in his spare time. He tried his hand at the different genres such as drama and comedy but he wasn't very good. Furthermore, he had a poor awareness of what was funny and what went across the line. He couldn't empathize with the audience's emotions. He couldn't determine what was acceptable and what was not. He would make jokes that were not funny or else they poked fun at serious elements of life, you know the things that should not be mocked at. He wanted to write an existential novel about the world ending and the last moments of mankind, but such a novel would require so much time and effort, things he didn't have. Sibéal was looking at becoming a model and if that didn't work out she was looking at becoming a singer and if that didn't work out she would try something else. She flirted with the idea of selling herself for a living. Brian was meeting people and still on the hunt for a directors gig, but without much success. But he was improving and getting closer or at least he felt he was. The trio were young and restless. They had so many dreams, and aspirations and the world seemed limitless. But there were many like them scattered around Los Angeles. A host of hungry dreamers took refuge on this dry sun kissed soil and they couldn't see each other. They were so lost on their own goals that the lives of others were irrelevant.

Sibéal did meet a producer on one occasion that seemed to have substance but he had tricked her and actually just wanted to have sex with her. He took her to his house and promised her this and that, but only if she would strip naked for him. She told him to "piss off" and walked out his door slamming it shut and

cracking the glass pane. She ended up having to walk home a couple of miles in a fuming state. She had really thought that this guy was honest. This kind of behaviour was rife throughout L.A. Producers would promise young desperate actors the world, but only in exchange for sexual favours and if the actor or actress didn't give in, that opportunity was lost. Of course, Sibéal had integrity and she turned down any such exchanges. She had her pride and was not going to trade it for anything.

They would sit and read the news of L.A. and see all the gruesome stories about crime in L.A. and they would wonder what kind of world it was where people could do such horrible things. For instance, a dog fighting ring was busted a while back and fifty dogs were rescued from horrible conditions and they talked for a while about how disgusting dog fighting was and how deplorable those who were involved in it were. Almost every day someone was killed in Los Angeles be it accidental or intended. It was unique in that respect. They came from the west of Ireland where everyone was nice and simple. In L.A. it was far from simple. On one starry night when Brian was walking home from the pub intoxicated he came across a stray dog who followed him home. He wandered through the streets with the dog by his side. It must have been a pit bull type of dog and it looked so shy and timid. He decided to call it Kane after the film Citizen Kane. He patted it from time to time and the dog seemed to enjoy the company. Brian despite his youthful vigour for life had a heart and dogs always had a special place in his heart. The next morning, he took the dog into the pound hoping it may be adopted. They only got to stay one week in the pound before they were put to sleep and so he hoped someone somewhere in this vast universe would adopt him.

The three decided given their failure to avail of an agent. That they had not carved the red sea of Hollywood open with their "talent," had forced them to exhaust other options. Agents made a fortune out of desperation in Hollywood. People can convince themselves of anything and in the case of a struggling artist they become convinced that paying large sums of money to charlatans will cut out a route for them to suddenly succeed. No one gives it to you in life, you have to earn it. Some agents were honest it must be said. They tried their best for their retrospective clients and that is all anyone can do in life. For instance, they would only take on a certain number and concentrate on those. By choosing quality over quantity they did more for that small number of clients.

However, most agents were unfortunately fraudsters. They cashed in on the desperation of Hollywood's stray starving individuals. When man is desperate he does desperate things and this is the mechanics of how agents made a fortune in the land of dreams. What invariably happened was that the desperate individuals remained failures for an extended period of time. That they had not fulfilled the prophecy of achieving and being successful, they get anxious and in their apprehension, they believe what they read on the adverts from agents pertaining to turn their careers around. "Are you a struggling actor or actress? DO YOU WANT TO SUCCEED? I can make it happen; 95% success rate." This kind of banter is enough to draw the flies towards the honey, but rarely was there honey to be found.

Sean would regularly walk out of agent meetings in anger. He wasn't deceived by them. Was it because he didn't care or didn't have the ability? It was the former of the two to be honest. The agent had no say in his sullen fate. You have to want it in life as much as have the ability. Intelligence is not enough. One must want to work and sell themselves. Having all the ability in the world counts for nothing if you don't work hard and strive to put that ability into practice. Sibéal and Brian also never gained from their agents. Looking back years later and chuckling, they realized how deceived and rash they were. But the young are foolish and the young who want, are even more so. Their lives were scripted. It was auditions and rejections and a few laughs at the weekend. Surely there must have been more to life than this? This is how the film industry turned. What can one do other than try to live as good as they can and I suppose work hard.

"So Sibéal, are you being lined up in the next big film or what," asked Brian as they sat on the sand of the famous Leo Carillo State Beach downing drinks and lighting cigarettes. The sun was awesome and the blue ocean was tranquil. It was early in the afternoon on a week day, so the beach was mostly empty. They could hear the generous waves crashing on the shore line.

"I managed to seduce the guys. They want me to audition, although I think they want something in return."

"Money!"

"My body more like."

"You do what you have to do."

“Would you?”

“Well if it was two women I would.”

“Well it’s too old fat men who are sexual deviants, I’d say.”

“I wouldn’t be inclined. But if that’s what needs to be done,” he said laughing.

The sun beamed down on them along with a gentle breeze. They were scantily dressed.

“Well Sean, should I or shouldn’t I! That is the defining question.”

“That is the big question. Like Sartre said, we all choose.”

“Well?”

“To get anywhere in life involves selling yourself, be it your body or your integrity. There is no such thing as the perfect job. You do things you don’t like as much as you do things you do like. If I want to get anywhere I will have to do as the boss says.”

“You start at the bottom and work your way up.”

“That’s where the two producers will be starting alright it seems,” joked Sibéal.

“As long as it isn’t too weird. I don’t know, I wouldn’t do it. They promise you the world and give you reality.”

“They seemed like they would give me the break I need. I am sick of waitressing.”

“Sibéal, don’t let desperation and emotion dictate how you think. What you want to happen and what actually happens are two different things,” remarked Sean.

“Ah Sean they probably just want the usual stuff, not that you’d know too much about that,” said Brian.

Sean got up and walked away and looked at him coldly. He stared at the Pacific Ocean, marvelling at its beauty. He wondered in that very moment what everyone was doing and how his family were back at home and how they were coping. It was a sad thought knowing that he hadn’t seen his family in years.

“You don’t. I’m not being rude,” continued Brian.

“Because I have no interest,” replied Sean.

“What about that girl you were chatting to last night?” asked Sibéal.

“That went well. Started talking to her about the futility of existence and so on. She wasn’t impressed.”

“Sean you tell her she is good looking and tell her she is funny and so on. Don’t bring up the Kierkegaard or whatever his name is, existential rubbish. Most people don’t want to hear about how meaningless their life is. They want to be told how brilliant their life is. They want validation and a successful man gives it to them.”

“I can’t lie.”

“That’s your weakness. You are too nice in a ruthless business that demands charisma.”

“Like you, is it Brian,” said Sibéal smartly.

“Yea. I ain’t nice, but I do what has to be done.”

“Which is why you are sitting at home all day smoking and doing drugs.”

“It’s coming. The break is coming. I can feel it.”

“Ye two really are like a team. Partners in crime. One is delusional and the other is harshly self-critical,” said Sibéal.

“Do you know how many aspiring actors are waiting tables? How many scripts are written every year that are not read? How many films that go straight to DVD?” asked Sean of Sibéal.

“Thousands, thousands and yes more thousands.”

“A lot. About 95% of them fail. 95% of us get nowhere in life. 95% of us are living lives we don’t want to live and carry through the fantasy that we can become good.”

“We all struggle, but some of us struggle with a smile,” quipped Brian, who hadn’t let the struggles faze him one bit.

“A laugh is better than a grimace. A laugh carries hope, a fool’s hope. A grimace gets you nowhere,” said Sibéal.

“Why do we bother? Why not drive a truck for the rest of my life? At least that’s something. Ah well, it all ends in regret either way. May as well give it a shot.”

“A shot to nothing,” said Sibéal.

“Life is tough,” said Sean, “it is one great struggle and rarely do people come out of it successfully. Seldom do people live the life they dream of living. We all must compromise in this world. We all must sell ourselves a little bit to achieve what we want. But we must give it a go. You will not succeed if you do not try.”

“Part of the problem is that there are so many of us. There must be thousands of you and I. What chance I have is a low chance. We are when you think about it all the same. We all possess the same skills and suffer the same flaws. What Hollywood or any business wants is people who are different,” said Sibéal.

“In fairness I happen to think I am unique. Who looks as good as I do?” said Brian joking.

“You have the right attitude alright, but every day I see lots of you Brian,” said Sibéal. “The world is full of confident young men and women. What it is not full of is special confident young men and women.”

“I think it is all relative though. We can’t all be geniuses or else no one would be a genius. If we were all fools, there would be no fool. The smart and talented of this world only exist because there is so few of them,” said Sean.

“That is true alright...” said Sibéal “...and I don’t think people can grasp that situation. I went for an audition a while back and there was about two hundred of us in line and we were all convinced we were special. We all thought we had what it took to get the part. In reality though we were delusional, every last single one of us was about as sane as the man who dances to the music that no one else can hear.”

“Often it is those who are clinically insane who are more tuned in with the cynicism of the world than those who call themselves normal,” replied Sean.

“You really are cynical though,” said Brian.

“I guess I am. But few of us see the world for what it is. We are now living in the 21st century and we are educated and this education convinces us that we are

smart when we are not. The smart people of this world understand how it works. They know themselves, they know the world and they know the people in the world. We all know the decisions we make in life, but very few of us understand why we make a certain decision. So I may buy a cappuccino for instance; I know what I have bought, as in a cappuccino, but I don't know why I bought it. People make decisions and have opinions. They know their decision and opinion; they don't know however why they made such a decision and possess such an opinion. That is a great flaw in our psyche. We really, despite the time and plethora of knowledge we harness, don't know ourselves. We respond to others and they respond to us. We live without thought. We live on the fast lane."

"But if I had to think about every decision I made before I made it, life would lose its spontaneity," said Brian. "Let's say I was having a conversation and you asked a question and I went off and thought about my answer for five minutes, wouldn't life be a lot stiffer. Decision making like conversation often must flow for if it doesn't, life loses its energy."

"I think you need a balance," replied Sibéal thoughtfully. "You need to know when to talk fast, live fast and when to talk slow, live slow. You need to know when to live and when to think. Too much of either is detrimental."

"That is fair," said Brian.

"Find the middle road," replied Sean.

Tears in Rain: The Vacation

The gang saved up some cash and decided they needed a holiday. They looked on the map and realized that New York and its carnival atmosphere and great culture was too far, particularly in the icy cold of winter, although they would have loved to see its fine cityscape. They agreed on North Dakota. It was close and they didn't actually know anything about it which made it all the more mysterious. They packed themselves on a bus and headed towards the north west of America. They hadn't really planned the journey and were just relying on instinct to guide them. Brian and Sibéal sat together in the bus and Sean was in front of them. There were other folks on the bus too but gradually as they progressed through the states the numbers grew smaller. The bus drove through day and night stopping at restaurants to allow the occupants to the bathroom and eat. They saw the beautiful country sides of the various states. From the green hills to the snake like rivers that were pure blue. They saw farm animals and the sun tormented them as they sat and stared out at their lives go by. They were thinking about what everyone else in the world was doing, how people were going about their lives and living and sleeping and enjoying the world. They thought about all the people suffering in hospitals, all those who were terminally ill. They thought of the war in Syria that was raging and dared to dream about how lucky they were, right here in America, where the peace dripped slowly. They thought about how many animals were in a state of pain right now? How many dogs were starving across the world?

Although they had no money, they had their happiness and spirit and a bottle of whiskey and that was all they needed in the snow of the north. They got off the bus and walked a distance side by side with cars driving by and the spray skimming up in the freezing cold and icy wind. It was very cold and they had not braced themselves for such an icy wind. They stocked up on supplies of cigarettes and alcohol. The food, they had to beg for and managed to convince some diner to give them the left-over scraps. They hovered behind the diner, smoking and laughing for a few hours and the chef kindly gave them some of the leftovers. Such living on the bare minimum is something that all young people should do at some point in their lives. It gives you a feel and an appreciation for the finer things in society. The coldness really touched their hearts; its callous icy shards flowed through their veins. They looked around them and saw such white freezing temperatures and cars breaking down in the cold. The white wind and fog drenched the atmosphere. The paths were frozen

stiff, they left foot prints in the snow, the air was thick with bite and the light was dim.

The holiday was a welcome change for Brian. His mood was up and down like a rollercoaster these days. The failure was depressing him. He blamed others for his lack of foray in Hollywood. Producers were “out to get him,” and they were “jealous of what he potentially could achieve.” Fellow directors were concocting plots behind his back to make sure he did not gain success. Rather than blame himself for his failure he would take it out on his friends, on random people and on the world. Further to this he needed attention and unconditional love to live day to day. He needed respect and adoration like trees need sunlight in the summer. He was in his own words: “Either loved by all or love by none.” That his life had not panned out as he had envisaged he took to reckless behaviour as a way to ward off the demons of despair. So he would abuse alcohol and take dangerous drugs and engage in promiscuous sex, all in the desperate hope to forget his woes. For what is addiction, but the chance to forget your failures. But at least Brian was living it must be said. Sean was still dead from within. He could sit motionless in the same spot for hours, like a cat waiting for prey to venture into its immediate area. It was the unpredictability of Brian versus the certainty of Sean. Whereas Brian lived each moment for what it was and on a titanic high, Sean had planned everything in advance. Brian was a spur of the moment kind of man and Sean was a diligent planner.

They decided on their second last day, after a trip into Fargo on another pseudo shopping trip, that they would throw another drunken party, to honour their lives and their total failure on American soil. They asked a few neighbours to join in, but very few came and it was mainly the three of them on their own, as usual, drinking and contemplating the stars and the roads of America that led to failure and success. For what else could they do, but look at the setting sun and thank God and each other that they were alive and had such good friends. They broke chairs and tables and fired objects out their window and the music was turned up so loud and they danced and celebrated their failure like it was a success and that things could only get better. They were still young and had that on their side, but nothing stays the same in life. Things decay or they grow up or they inevitably die. Life is tough and it was from the outside looking in a struggle for our lonesome travellers who were on a merciless road, but if you do not fear it, you will go far. That was the motto of Brian and Sibéal. They would hitch rides to places and scrape the bottom of barrels for food and struggle to

pool money together to pay rent, but that only made them more resilient and gave them a will to live. It is often said that the successful man lives a privileged life, but the homeless man appreciates life more. The starvation and hunger makes everyday a battle and the anxiety makes one feel alive.

One clear night when they were back in LA, the trio were passing by the back of a bar and they stole a keg of beer and rolled the metal casing back to their apartment and this keg of beer was their alcohol supply for a couple of weeks and so profitable was stealing kegs in terms of the money saved on beer that they would repeat the trick numerous times on the same bar. They must have stolen four or five kegs by the time the bar owners decided to move the kegs indoors away from the dreaming thieves. The kegs would be put into the bath tub and when they wanted a drink they had to push back the plunger to release the beer. It was nice the beer. So instead of going out to bars to drink they would sit at home and drink themselves drunk. If they were in the mood for a party, they would skip through the neighbourhood and find a party that they could gate crash. One party was rough and turned into a nightmare when an individual who was high on drugs got a knife and stabbed himself through his right eye. The blood poured out from his wound as a few people jumped on him and an ambulance was called to assess the situation. A few parties turned into trouble but the trio were smart in that if they sensed a bad vibe from a party in question they would leave pretty quickly. One time at a party, everyone left to go clubbing and the trio said they were going home but they actually went back to the empty house and went in the back door. They didn't rob anything of serious value, but did take the food and drink from the fridge. It was a nice way of not paying for food for a while. They often used do this at various parties.

"Anyhow I am beginning to think my best shot is hooking up with a rich one," said Brian taking a slug of the beer as he spoke.

"A woman I take it," replied Sean.

"Yea, preferably, but you never know."

"Man, the minute you sell yourself its game over."

"They all do it; they all did it. Man, I'm just sick of this rubbish. Sweeping floors and setting up cameras. I want to be telling them what to do, not having them tell me what to do."

"I get you, but everyone starts at the bottom, unless you are someone's son."

“I’m already prostituting myself, what’s the harm in upping the game.”

“Back then it was grand. Now days with the internet, stuff gets out very fast. One must be careful. If the papers got a sniff, that’s you finished.”

“I could go into rehab for a week. God, rehab does wonders for a struggling stars PR. I’ve got a drug addiction or I’m depressed. People love it. The whole system is pathetic. We are all being used. We are being taken advantage of. That agent has barely even got a job for me.”

“We are all fools in this world. That’s how the world turns, on people’s foolishness. We buy things we don’t need and do things we don’t need to do.”

“True. I didn’t need that agent or at least I could have got a better one. I should have done what you did. How the hell are you so relaxed. We are both failing, no offense, but you are calm, whereas I’m drinking every night.”

“What can you do? If I fail I fail, that’s the worst that can happen. It’s not like I am heading to jail.”

“Looking back and knowing how tough it would be, would you do it all again?” asked Brian.

“No, I would have stayed in Limerick, and become a farmer and live the simple life. Not a lot of money, but simple. You can’t beat Limerick as a city though.”

“Farming! That’s a big difference from directing.”

“I prefer being alone. To be honest, I don’t think this directing thing is working out. I’m not a people person. Dreaming I love, but living I can’t do.”

“You sound as if you are quitting.”

“Close to it. Prefer the writing side of it. Less stress.”

“I will keep punching away, but I’m punching a concrete wall and just beating myself.”

“Aren’t we all. But if you punch long and hard enough, you eventually get through, even if it’s made of steel.”

“Yea but there is no use making it when you are old. It’s a young man’s world. And if you can’t make it young you won’t make it old.”

“Lads ye look like a bunch of sad monks. Why don’t ye liven up and get some life into yourselves,” said Sibéal joining in sarcastically.

“What’s there to be cheerful about? I am a failure. It’s been three years and I haven’t gained an inch. In fact, I have regressed about a mile.”

“We still have our youth, despite all our troubles.”

“That doesn’t last though,” said Sean.

“I know, but still, I will worry when I’m old enough to.”

“I’m going in for a line,” exclaimed Brian rising from his seat in a hurry.

“I thought you’d given up that stuff. It will ruin you.”

“It’s all I have now, that and the drink.”

“You have us don’t you,” said Sibéal.

“I want a house, a car, a wife, a swimming pool. I don’t want to be living in a tiny apartment in some slum with police sirens going off all night,” he said walking off.

“If he got caught with that, we’d all be in prison,” said Sibéal.

“Yea. I told him to kick it. But he’s depressed.”

“Ye two are best friends, yet so different. He’s confident, self-absorbed and after fame. You are quiet, full of self-doubt and after very little. To be honest I’m not quite sure what you are after even though I’ve known you for ten years.”

“I’m after freedom. I’m after honesty. I’m after happiness. What they are I don’t know. Perhaps I have them now and I don’t realise.”

“I was thinking that alright,” said Sibéal with a smile. “If Brian doesn’t succeed I would worry about him. If you don’t succeed, you would be happy I’d nearly say.”

“Ah yea. Success for all its positives brings a lot of stress as well. Then you are expected to repeat your success. I’d much rather have nothing and be free than have it all in chains. What about you?”

“What about me?”

“What do you want?”

“I just want to dance my way through my life. Never looking too far forward and never ever looking back.”

“You know what Thoreau said: “Never look back unless you intend going that way.””

“What does that mean?”

“It means stuff happens when you are young, but you move on. You make mistakes. Everyone does. It’s the fabric of human life.”

“As long as they are not too big, the mistakes.”

“I think when you are young, you can be forgiven, because young people are stupid.”

They both laughed at this accusation.

“But certainly, your credo is the best one. Move forward all the time. Not too slow, not too fast,” said Sean.

“You can’t change what you have done, but you can change yourself.”

“You can’t change the world, only your interpretation of it.”

“Who said that?”

“I did.”

“No you didn’t!”

“Viktor Frankl!”

“Is he a film producer?”

“Ha ha. No, he survived the holocaust.”

“Wow. He must have a different perception of the world.”

“While everyone around him was dying, he survived. When everyone was suffering, he chose to smile and in a concentration camp of all places.”

“What, he was one of the guards?”

“No, no, he was one of the prisoners, but he just behaved differently from all the other prisoners. Being starved and beaten, and yet he never gave in. He has a famous sort of quote or expression, where he says that it was those who gave away their last piece of bread to a friend, were the ones that actually survived the longest in there.”

“So those who were compassionate, stayed alive and those who were desperate to escape, died.”

“I think that’s kind of it. You have to find meaning in the failure or the suffering. I’ve seen homeless men on the street who have nothing and give all their scraps of bread to a beloved dog beside them and they are content and happier than most people in this business. Strange isn’t it. To have nothing and to be nothing can be very rewarding in itself.”

“I don’t think Brian would like that lifestyle!” said Sibéal laughing. “And when you have it all, that’s when it’s most dangerous. That’s when you get too confident and do something you regret.”

“True. That’s what happened me. I’ve messed up badly in my life.

“Why what did you do?”

“Ah, I don’t know. I was young and foolish and didn’t understand the rules of the game. This is why I want to give up this directing. I am paying for past mistakes or I will pay in the future. Its grand when you are nothing, the world does not care about you. You can walk down that street at ease, nobody recognises you, nobody labels you. You are nothing, a shadow and nobody cares about shadows. That’s what I like, not being known. Once they know you however, they tear you apart. They feast on your past, on your insecurities and mistakes. Once you are known you are condemned.”

“What did you do? We all make mistakes though.”

“I was trying to fit in and would drink, because that’s the only way I can fit in, when I’m around people I don’t know. Sure, you drink too much and do stuff you regret. Elizabeth Bishop used do the same. She would drink and make the situation worst. I used drink too much in my late teens and do stupid things, things I regret. I guess I learned to stop drinking and to stay away from people.”

“Ah, we all make mistakes and in hindsight we say we shouldn’t have done things. Look the number of people I don’t get along with is about ten times the number of actual friends I have. We all seem to hate each other in this world.”

“I really think you are better off just avoiding everyone in this world. You may live a boring life, but it is a life without suffering. That is ultimately the choice in life: Boredom or Suffering. We all must choose between the two, at least that’s what Madame De Stael said.”

“I think though the fact that you express remorse is a good indication of your integrity. Remorse is the greatest teacher of human beings. We all mess up. I went out got drunk and fooled around and got in trouble with the law. It happens, you learn and become a better person.”

“Yea, but some things in life are unforgiveable.”

“You have been giving me advice, so I’ll give you some. You fall off the bike, you get back on. We do stupid things and that is because we are human.”

They both laughed at this assertion. It is sad to say, but this would be the last time the three would be together in the one place and enjoying each other’s company. One has to grow up in life. The gang had now been on American soil for over four years and had changed. The energy and passion that exemplifies youth was slowly tearing them apart. Their faces had altered, no doubt from the booze and smokes. But so too had their opinions of the world and more importantly each other. They were getting sick of the whole game and the game is for young people. They took one last picture of each other, the final picture of them smiling and being happy and loving life and living. They hung on dearly to the memories and that was all they could do.

Death is the Hunter

25

We think we are living when all we are doing is managing our presentation to society. We don't care what one person thinks of us but we do care what society the person thinks of us.

You are stigmatized as much as the sex offender is. But this stigma moulds you in such a way that you become acceptable by the community. This acceptance is not the opposite of stigma; it is a stigma. What the herd says to you latently or indirectly is that if you behave a certain way we will like and endorse you. Thus the desire to be accepted functions just like the threat of stigma does.

Socializing maintains society.

A psychotic schizophrenic living all alone on an island would not need to be regulated. It is the fact that they interact with society that necessitates that they be regulated.

Interaction breeds conformity. Hypothetically if we grew up all alone on an island, we would be completely different as a person. What I am trying to infer is that society plays a huge role in determining your behaviour. A lot of the time you just react to how society will perceive you.

We are petrified of society and the antidote to this fear is narcissism. I see so many puppets where society is the puppeteer. They live to earn societies approval. The insecure narcissist seeks certainty in the eyes of the onlooker. They are hooked on earning insincere validation off society. Whereas the mature individual seeks validation from himself.

We are not afraid of being laughed at by a kangaroo.

Living amongst society gives me no pleasure; understanding society does.

26

"The trick is in what one emphasizes; we either make ourselves happy or we make ourselves miserable. The amount of work we do is the same." It is attitude that determines happiness. And if you have a mature grateful attitude, you will be happy in the future. The mistake people make is they think of the destination and not the journey. Happiness becomes the accumulation of X, Y and Z. But the pursuit of happiness does not yield happiness.

Expecting love to bring happiness is a flawed perspective. Love is actually the cause of deep unhappiness.

One must always think of what a privilege it is to be alive.

27

In today's world we pawn our dignity for publicity.

For every one that makes it, you have millions waiting tables.

The way the media hunt the famous is no better than the Gestapo.

The flaw is we want to be liked and so much of our behaviour is just a response to that.

People don't really care about you unless you are a sex offender. Thus, narcissism is a waste of time.

I am like a narcissist in reverse; the less "likes" I get, the happier I am.

28

Embrace who you are and become you. Being who you are is the most courageous thing you can do in life. One must understand that your life will immediately become better if you accept who you are. The dream life is not for everyone.

Loneliness must be seen as a friend. It is a friend you can go much time without meeting, but when you do encounter him, you must appreciate him. The happiest people are those that can count on loneliness as a companion.

Self-respect is not depending on someone to like you in order to like yourself. Self-respect is the ability to live alone.

Your greatest friend and worst enemy, are one, they are you, for it is your own thoughts, your own attitude, that will determine whether you are happy or not.

One of the things I have learned, is that if you want to be happy, one must lower their expectations of how "happy" they wish to be. Gratitude is a gift that costs nothing.

What one should aim for is to be philosophically smart. Many are academically smart or street smart, but few are philosophically smart.

Frankl said we need a goal. But why not make gratitude your goal, like the Buddhists do. We seldom measure a man by his ability to be grateful.

29

Why is there something and not nothing always leads to the conundrum of who created the creator. This leads me to believe, as Kant asserted, that our perception as humans of the universe actually limits our understanding of the universe. Our perception, as much as it affords us, can only help us understand to a threshold. Perhaps, given our limitations in perception, we can never truly know the answer to why there is something and not nothing.

30

The general dictates how the soldiers in the camp conduct themselves. In the free world, society itself is the general and the soldiers.

Do the people determine the government or does the government determine the people? One thing for certain is that the economic system determines them both. The economic system grooms us to be fathers and mothers.

Men and women alike are condemned to conform because that is how they are taught. What I am really trying to demonstrate is that although there is a biological pressure to marry, there is also a societal pressure and often it is stronger.

We think that because we are not labelled negatively, such as being a criminal, that we are not labelled at all. False. We are being labelled and the resultant society you see and live in, is moulded by labels, labels you cannot perceive. A sort of latent labelling equilibrium has been reached. Men must behave as men and women as women. They think there is no sociological force at work, but there is. So used to society as we perceive it, we cannot perceive how labels have shaped our world. The conformists are controlled by labelling just as much as the criminals are.

Germaine Greer once said that prisoners worry about nothing except their release date. Makes you think. People in the supposedly free world have much greater worries than those incarcerated. They worry about job security, bills, children, feeding themselves and so on.

The will to avoid suffering invariably leads to suffering from a sociological perspective. Man must, in order to possess a good standard of living, expose himself to society which leads to suffering. But should he try to avoid that sociological suffering, he lives below the poverty line, which is a suffering in itself. The moral is that suffering is as much a part of modern existence as is enjoyment.

Society makes people unbearably unhappy. They suffer to earn societies approval and when they do that, they feel good about themselves. But suffering to be happy is the opposite of happiness.

Stigma still exists; we just don't make it obvious.

When did humans first learn of humiliation? That is what anthropologists should study. I suspect schizophrenia first appeared around the same time we learned of humiliation.

31

My paranoia is my creativity and I would be nothing without it. Sometimes the walls are built to keep the monster out; sometimes they are built to keep him in. I do not run because I am not human; I run because I am human.

When you start to treat everyone as a journalist, you tend to do things differently.

“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.” Andre Gide.

What is your prison is also your redemption: your mind!

You kill or imprison a top drug kingpin and someone else just takes his place. No matter how big you are or how big you think you are, nobody cares and you are replaceable.

My philosophy is like a cult in reverse. Only in absolute solitude can you be free from society's claws.

Humans beings are crippled with their sense of belonging, of being approved.

32

True wisdom is the knowledge that no one, bar your mother, actually cares about you. If you died right now, life would just go on as if you never existed. That is how much you matter. In ways we are alive without being alive and dead without being dead.

Einstein had his version of insanity. My version of insanity is trying to make people you do not care about like you.

What enables me to soldier on, so to speak, is the fact that we don't care about each other. If I died right now, for whatever reason, life would go on. My neighbours, my co-workers, would attend my wake and then would forget about me, like I never existed. Likewise, if one of my neighbours died suddenly, I would just go on about my daily life without a bother. I am not trying to imply that I am sociopathic and lack empathy, but from an almost existential sociological perspective, we don't care about each other. On average 150,000 people die each day and life goes on.

You see it when a famous person dies. We say: "my thoughts are with his family." Are they really? I don't think they are. You just move on rather quickly.

To paraphrase Robert Frost, with two words I can sum up everything I have learned about life: nobody cares. The amount of people that are indifferent to you vastly outnumbers those who love or loathe you.

33

We are stigmatized without being deviant. We react to how society stigmatizes us. Society effectively says, if you behave a certain way, then we will accept you. Thus, it determines how you behave. It regulates you because you desire to be accepted. This desire to be accepted is not the opposite of stigma; it is a stigma; it functions the same way as stigma does. Thus, we are not individuals; just members of society.

For some men, it would be worst to be called a virgin than a rapist. For some, being laughed at is worse than being assaulted.

Every time you meet friends, go to a wedding, walk into work, that is how you are regulated. When you walk through a busy shopping mall, you are attacked

by the interpretation of those you pass by. Everyone laughs at everyone; everyone demeans everyone; I just cannot take it.

We all sort of know each other without knowing each other.

That we need to earn a living, we need to expose ourselves to society and because we do that, we are compelled to meet our gender stereotypes.

There are two ways to limit the stigma: conform or avoid the herd.

We think we are free. We are not. All our behaviour is predictable. We are regulated by society. Society determines how we think and hence act.

There is very little difference between the famous person and the man on trial in the court of law.

You see we want to expose ourselves to society and at the same time not be ridiculed. In fact, such is the economic system, we have to, as in we are forced to.

The two worlds, the world of solitude and the world of people. The world of people determines how you behave. Every action is scripted; every thought rehearsed. What I mean is that when you walk up a busy shopping centre, surrounded by people you do not know, your behaviour becomes predictable. Why? It does so because you are interacting with these people. You are trying to be positively labelled by them and hence this societal equilibrium is maintained.

We are social animals, but this socialization comes at price, in that we must behave a certain way in order to be approved. We seek approval in order to counter the threat of being laughed at. That is why individuals obsess over beauty, wealth, success, materialism and so on, because they are trying to be approved. The solution, which sounds so alien, is to actually limit being known. Purposely try to know less people and not more.

It is always the individual that is sick and not overall society.

Indifference is the healthiest option. The famous person is either loved or loathed. Both are unhealthy. If you can become happy with how society is indifferent to you, you will have succeeded in life.

It's the laughter I remember the most. I will remember them laughing at me till the day I die.

Autumn

The Abyss of Nothing: Part III

Week 51

None can escape. None can escape the might of the black hole. They had to conform to its will or die sooner. Not even light with its infinite acceleration and massive speed can flee from the clutches of this dark menace. They could neither see it nor feel it, but its presence was vital for life to continue. They needed its force to survive. They would become lost without it. It brought stability to their last few days. It enabled them to live a conventional life. Without this invisible force, they would be suspended in chaos and life would break down as we know it. The ship had latched onto the black hole unawares. It had become tangled in its web of deceit and there was no escape. It was in orbit around it, a stationary orbit. It could only stay locked in orbit or go into the dark hole; there was no retreat. They looked out the window panes and saw mirages of stars and a blurred set of colours. They saw the bleakness of the monster that is the unforgiving universe. They felt the wrath of its absolute zero temperature. The black hole was manipulating reality around them. This is how they knew it was there, for it was a shadow that could not be seen. But its strength influenced life around it. It caused the ship to circulate in one direction. To an outsider it looked as if the ship was free, but in reality it was chained to this dark star. They could only go in one direction. They had to accept the situation for what it was. It was either live as how the black hole dictated or do not live at all.

So they adapted to life on the ship, knowing fully well that time was being wound down and it was only weeks and days before the oxygen ran out and their existence was cruelly ended. They stared into its darkness and saw themselves staring right back. This invisible awesome force was a mirror of man. It was sculpting the hearts of men, even the best of them. Everyone became mad and the laws of common life broke down. They could see it tainting the lives of the individuals. It tore the planets apart and the dust that was sucked into it. Why bother trying to fight its judgement? It was futile to go against it for one could not win. They could see the hands of time running down. The hour glass was nearly empty and fate was inevitable. How one approaches an impending death differs from person to person. Some people go

crazy, some shut down and accept their situation, some are convinced a new life lies beyond and some just try and enjoy themselves for the remaining few moments. This is what they did. They would talk and chat and recount stories of their youth and glory and how good it was to be alive. They recalled trips across the dusty sun kissed America in the back of trucks and rekindled the days spent on the snowy mountains of France and the flat green fields of Indonesia and so on. They remembered how they took it all for granted and never saw the end. They only saw themselves living forever.

They gazed out into the vast expansiveness of the colourless universe. They saw the light from stars that had taken billions of years to reach them. It put things in perspective. Rarely had they contemplated the realities of life when they were alive on Earth. It was only when they were face to face with a certain death and the sands of time were running thin that they began to realize the futility of existence. They sighed at all the times they were worried about bills and what others thought of them. They found it sad at how they had engaged in this whole popularity contest on Earth. They wondered where their friends and family were? Had they survived the asteroid? They asked God for forgiveness and begged him to restore the world. "Where is God," they asked. "Where is he?"

They wondered what would happen if one slipped into the hole. Where did the hole take you? Was it a new life? Was it a parallel universe? If they went in would they be born again in a new life and a new world? What lay inside this monstrous Pandora's Box? Some of them thought it could be a chance of a new life whilst others who were schooled in physics knew that once you went into the hole you never came out. Some were optimists and risk takers and saw only the light and others were more cautious and pessimistic. The hole and what lay inside it was as peculiar as it was intimidating. It sucked the life out of many a star and they wondered what became of all the energy? Did it just radiate into the hidden universe? They wondered and contemplated going into it for it was a shot to nothing. They were destined to die anyhow and so maybe if they ventured into the abyss they may survive, but then again they may not.

They floated around the monster at an even pace. This was their new home. They could not escape it for they had passed the Event Horizon. They were chained to this beast. They only had two choices: Remain in orbit around it and suffocate to death or venture into the hole itself. The days of the blue skies and the melting sunshine were long dead. It was darkness all around except for the stars that splintered the blackness. They wondered how the other ships were

doing? Had they found a new home or had they perished in the abyss? They were gods and they were mediocre; they would survive and they would suffocate; they had lived and they were shadows. Life went on. They hoped for tomorrow and they dreamed of yesterday. The fear came alive and the happiness melted into the frozen universe. Some yearned for a greater existence; some just fell asleep as if drunk. That was the life.

“There is much strength in weakness, much courage in individuality and much light in the dark universe however dark it may be,” said The Priest trying to convince his fellow men that ignoring the lust of the black hole would be the correct way to approach this. He was schooled on the divine and that this life was the only life worth courting. “We must ignore the callings of this beast and concentrate on the life we have got.” The Narcissist differed in his opinion however. This black hole was a chance to escape the certain death. He only saw a positive outcome should they choose to delve into the jaws of it. “Let’s do it,” he would attest buoyantly. Either way there was no certainty. The only guarantee was the infinite and this life was a game of probabilities. The Existential Nihilist and The Scientist were both undecided as to what they should do. Would it be better to face death now or would it be better to take a chance and see if the black hole would give birth to a newfound life? But then they could soar through the black hole and be crushed to death. This was the risk, for man’s knowledge of the black holes was deficient. Anyhow they were doomed either way. They had gone past the singularity and as such escape was not viable. It was just a question of whether they should die now or die later.

They sat and pondered and discussed like humans do and wondered what was the best option. Time was slowly winding down along with their existence. They would argue for a while and then take a break and look out into the awesome chasm that was the indifferent universe. There was no light without the darkness and no darkness without the light. It was all relative. You needed one to have the other. They thought about the family and friends that had long perished in the apocalyptic Earth and then they thought about the end and total annihilation of mankind altogether. Everything man had ever achieved; all his glory, all his genius, all his empires, all his success, all his love and all his memories would be utterly vanquished into the vastness of the universe. The books he had written and read, the paintings he had painted, the films he had produced, the scientific theories that could predict the galaxies and the atoms, the chemical reactions that made life easier, they would all dissipate and would

be no more. Man was set to be guillotined by the universe and the very proof of existence would be erased. All they could do was watch it wind down to zero. This was the most frustrating thing of all, that they would see their own death as if they were being led to the firing squad and they were powerless to prevent it. If only they had lived when they could have lived, they would say. "If only I had lived."

Week 1

“I remember how I used worry so much,” said The Narcissist “and now I see that it was so foolish. Only now do I see it. Now when I can no longer see do I finally see.” He was talking to The Priest as he lay looking through a four-inch window into the doldrums of space. The ship had made it safely to space without any hiccups. The journey was tough on the body as it had to contend with the force of acceleration that stressed it so much and tried to pull it back into Earth. When they reached the atmosphere the fuel tanks were jettisoned and allowed to fall back into Earth. The ship then adjusted itself and set about in the direction of the mother ship and from there it went to the designated worm-hole. The Priest did get sick from the blast off. He was never one for flying and especially not into outer space. Eventually on their way to nothing they were allowed to remove their belts and move around. The weightless atmosphere hit them really hard and they became suspended in air. The Scientist found this lack of gravity peculiar and rewarding as she had dreamed every day of her life about going to space. The goal was to simply prolong life not to rescue it. But if they could find a new world in which to survive it would be a bonus despite the odds being so low. So they rocketed across the horizon of space, heading for the wormhole.

They had food supplies for eighteen months and oxygen for a similar amount. They also had to maintain their positive mental state which would be tough given that they would be confined to the perimeter of the shuttle. This is why the tests were so vigorous on Earth. They were trying to pick the strongest of the strong mentally. Experiments had shown that even those who would have been considered the strongest mentally could suffer breakdowns given the conditions in space. Lack of food or water was not the enemy. The enemy was the indifferent universe that drowned them in darkness and would not let them escape. Each person had chores to do, as assigned by The Scientist. Some had to clean the ship, whilst others had to keep an eye on the electronics and make sure everything was running smoothly. They were allowed alcohol only one day a week and they would drink and celebrate the calm end that was to greet them in the near future. They had to be careful though because any liquid that got into the open air could cause damage to the electronics of the ship, so the celebrations and laughter were not quite the same as on Earth. Most of the time was spent talking to one another, recounting tales of Earth. A common theme was how they had taken for granted life on Earth. “It was all about bills and work,” said The Narcissist, both revelling and distraught in this new scene of

stern coldness. Now in space it was all about survival and some grew into this mentality.

The Priest for instance found solace in this environment. It was the kind of environment he had seen in such desolate poverty in the poorest parts of the world wherein each day of existence is cherished, unlike the capitalist state of mind where man waked up anxious, enshrouded in his own fears. "There is so much beauty in the stars," he would say repetitively to himself and to others and he found a simple calmness in the naked universe. This new life had stripped away the stresses of Earth and laid bare life for what it was. Life in this world was nothing. Existence was worthless and the future was dim. Man on Earth had revolved around relationships and work so much that he had forgotten to live. How ironic it was that now they saw the truth, the harsh truth, but could not live.

Life it must be said was cold. After the initial high of being subjected to such a frigid reality wore off, the members became used to the darkness and the many stars and they gradually settled into a rhythm. They would get up when the alarm sounded at a certain time, they would clean themselves, they then would eat and they would chat as they ate and they got to know one another better because of it. If they had duties to attend to, they would perform them and then with the long days they would chat to each other and look at the screen that projected news from Earth. The asteroid was still three months away from its predicted strike so they would send messages home to family and loved ones and they would get return messages. Given that they were hurtling through space at such a speed the messages took a few seconds before they reached Earth and as the weeks ticked on the duration became longer. Light has a certain speed and this dictated how long it took for the messages to reach the planet Earth.

Week 7

“I once shared company,” said The Priest, “with a woman who had a profound impact on my life. She was different. She tried to school us on loving life not living it. Her philosophy was: Enjoy what you do and do what you enjoy. She once said something very interesting: No matter what was done to you in the past, you are here now and you may as well enjoy it. You are alive and well. Some people spend their whole lives complaining about their lives not being good enough that they end up dying from complaining too much. Live a little and love a lot. Just start loving.”

“I tried to love and then life was taken away from me,” said The Scientist.

“It would have ended all too quickly had you lived till you were ninety,” said The Priest, “that is the nature of life. It doesn’t matter what you do. You can do this or that. Come your final hour you will regret either choice. I suppose that you have died in regret shows that you lived a good life. You don’t want to die. You want to continue it and hence why you leave this world in bitterness. The only thing you are born rightfully with is your body. Everything else is either given to or taken from you. You only really possess your response. One cannot decide life only how they respond to life. You cannot choose the action only the reaction.”

“I am bitter alright. I was just beginning my new life. I had it all planned out. It couldn’t get any better and then the news of the asteroid hit and I thought that this was insane and that we could solve it. And then we couldn’t do anything and I was heartbroken.”

“We never see our own death. We never think that life will end. We live as though we will live forever and that is why we never live. But it is death and not life that gives love its grandeur. If you lived forever, every marriage would end in divorce. If you were immortal, you would die alone. It is the fact that we are mortal that makes life what it is. It means we appreciate it more. My advice to you is not to fight it. Do not deride the struggle but rather embrace the struggle. There is no use complaining about your fate if it is sealed. One must enjoy their lives as they would their final few hours before the grim reaper visits.”

“What daily existence proved is that people will argue over anything just to pass the time and only now do I see this,” said The Scientist.

“Yes people wasted their whole lives in search of a better one. The life they had was not enough. They wanted someone else’s life. They wanted the success and the money that someone else had gained. They never realized the chance that accompanies life. What are the odds of a life sustaining planet? Trillions. What are the odds of water in another planet? Trillions. What are the odds that a species will learn to realize itself and the universe? A trillion trillion’s. People should have stopped complaining about their lives when they were alive. They should have stopped living in the past and started thinking in the present and preparing for the future. It’s far easier to be nothing in this universe than to be something. All I say to you and the fellow ship mates, is make the most of your final few weeks. Make the most of your life that is left. It will be over before you know it. Don’t complain about life and God or about random insignificant things that have no bearing on your existence. Stop following and stop fighting just to relieve the boredom.”

““There is only one constant in the world,” a philosopher once said. “There is only one thing that stays the same and that never changes and that is change itself.” That is the only certainty one can be guaranteed.”

“That is true,” said The Priest.

“It’s unfortunate that we never lived when life mattered. It seems I had a whole lot of living to do and so much time to do it all until the news of the asteroid broke. Now all I can do is gaze into the misty universe and think of what could have been.”

“I heard this a lot from people I met over the course of my travels. The sick would tell me that their greatest mistake was that they hadn’t lived enough and as they lay dying with tears in their eyes they realized how they wasted their lives doing nothing and being nothing. I saw the same things when I walked to the Mojave Desert. People all said that their lives had been cut short with the asteroid firing towards them. It was as if they had been shocked into realizing how valuable existence really is and how they had not really lived that much.”

“Yea it hit me hard I must admit. I think life was all about love and getting up in the morning to go into work. The mechanics and beauty and I suppose the horror of the universe never dawned on us. Life was simple. It was about falling in love and loving your job.”

“And now with nothing other than the huge darkness around us we finally see what life really was all about.”

“The blue skies have disappeared. Now only the harsh realities exist. I often wonder how my family is doing? At least they can still see the blue skies.”

“I too wonder about family and friends. I recall spending my summer with my best friends when young and life is so easy when you are young.”

“Yea,” said the Scientist “I remember when school finished and the high of the weekend would kick in and we would go off to parties and meet people and then we would go shopping and enjoy each other’s company. We progressed from school to college where we would go out and meet lads and they would try and flirt and seduce us and my god some of them were so stupid. The allure of being young cannot be matched but unfortunately we all must grow up and become adults and live the conventional life. I remember when I first met my boyfriend and we went to the cinema and he was really nervous and couldn’t say a word and he was so tense and I was thinking about how terrible this date was and how I was going to get out of there. But eventually he calmed down and became the rock in my life and life was falling into place or so I thought and now it is just falling apart. I was bitter when I heard of this eminent destruction first and our failure to be able to do anything to prevent it. But I suppose the one good thing is that it has made me value my life and these remaining few weeks all the more. We took life for granted when we were young and alive. We thought it would never end and that was our mistake. I guess I can say I was very lucky to have existed in this world.”

Week 15

“As I gaze into the abyss I can’t help thinking about the futilities of life,” said The Scientist. “You finally see what life is all about when you look into the darkness of your own mortality. The stars are no comfort now. Back on Earth I would look at them during the heat of the night and wonder how good it would be to get closer to them. I am as close now as I ever will be and yet I am further than I have ever been. Oh, the dreams, the dreams have become my prison. I never dreamt of this nightmare when I was alive. Life was about relationships and money and they covered over the haunting truths. Life was the escape and now I can no longer escape. Money and relationships. They kept me sane despite how shallow that may sound. They kept me alive. Now I am just a shadow lurking in the shadows of the universe. Now I no longer am.”

“The truth can set you free or it can enslave you,” said The Priest. “Can you not see that now you are finally free of the shackles? Now you have been untied from this shallow existence you called life. There is no law anymore. It is just you silhouetted against the titanic universe. You have been stripped of everything, your clothes, your identity and your life and you have been set free. There was a story once of a man who grew up in a concentration camp in a one-party dictatorship country. He was born in the camp and had lived all his life in such harsh squalid conditions, that not even animals deserve to live under. He had to slave from the age of six in dusty polluted coal mines that often fell apart under their own weight, killing the workers. If he did not work hard enough he was beaten. If he stepped out of line he was beaten. If he stole corn to crush his hunger, he was beaten. His life was horrible. He had never known love or happiness. His life consisted of work and fear. It rained frequently and he had to sleep on a concrete floor in his one roomed hut. One day when looking over the mountain, he decided to escape, to see what was beyond the rain drenched horizon. So, during the night, with the cold piercing his skin he cut the wires and made his escape. He ran to a new life following the river from the mountains, never once looking back at the camp. And so, he began his first day of freedom. It was wonderful he thought when he reached a city with its towering skyscrapers and favourable atmosphere. He got to shop for clothes and eat a variety of foods and meet and chat to fellow people, without the constraint of fear. He saw landscapes and beautiful lakes and the snow fell occasionally. It was bliss. But gradually his view of the free world began to change. He saw people were corrupt. He saw how money dictated their lives. He saw how they were obsessed with image and gain. In the camp the enslaved were friends and

helped each other. In the “real world,” everyone competed against one another. The camp was full back then with the “guilty” he thought and yet the jails are full in the free world also. Nobody committed suicide in the camp yet so many each day committed suicide in the city he was now in. He saw a sick diseased life that revolved around money and image. So he began to stay indoors, with the blinds drawn, living in the darkness and seldom venturing outside. Eventually he had seen enough and decided he had suffered enough also. So he got a rope, tied it to the ceiling and hanged himself.”

“Why do you tell me this story?” asked The Scientist.

“Because the real prison is life itself,” replied The Priest. “You are free now. Free from the opinions and judgements of others. You are facing a certain end and so you may as well try and enjoy it. I lost count of the number of people who came to me seeking help not because they were suffering or in trouble but because they weren’t living “the ideal life”. People lived in a society where they had everything and yet complained more. They had cars, houses, friends, a good way of life and yet they wanted a better life or a better image. The problem was not that they didn’t have enough but rather they had too much and didn’t appreciate what they had. Capitalism was the penitentiary and the universe was their salvation. Look into the stars and find yourself; look into the stars and realize how fortunate you are to exist.”

“I find this bemusing coming from a devoted servant of God.”

“Buddhism showed me the light friend and in this darkness I see it more than ever.”

Week 27

“Why do I bother waking up in this cold. What is the point in continuing this journey if life has no longer a calling?” asked The Narcissist.

“People need a reason to wake up in the morning when being able to open your eyes is really the only reason you need,” said The Existential Nihilist. “What is the meaning of it all? Meaning is just a word of language and without language there is no meaning. People either spend their lives trying to find meaning or to understand the meaning. Life is rudderless and sails in any direction. The universe has really opened my eyes. Now I finally see. It’s like having a terminal illness. One becomes indifferent to a certain death. Some become crazy with the anxiety and some casually accept their fate.”

“I think some people find happiness in the meaning or in having meaning,” said The Narcissist.

“There are two types of happiness. One is happiness that has been objectified. It consists of three things, work, marriage and a family. If you possess these three things you are generally regarded as being happy. The second type of happiness is pure happiness that sweats from within. We plan our lives and hence plan our happiness. In theory your life will be perfect. You plan it out as it will go. In reality it may turn out differently. You must just take each day, week, month and year as it comes. Just embrace the mistakes and failures.”

“I think many people are guilty of trying to plan their lives. I know I did looking back. I would look at things and say when I had this or that, my life would fall into place.”

“And did it?”

“Never. I just wanted more than I already had.”

“The want became an addiction. To live in want is to live as an addict. People spent far too long in want of a better life and ignored the one they had. Life was all about the better life and not the one you were living. People wasted time living in the future and turning a blind eye to the present. They die like we will now drenched in remorse over having never lived at all.”

“I feel as if I have aged now in these last twenty weeks. I feel as if I am an old man who has lived his whole life and now faces into his own death. Yet I am only in my forties and have or had so much living to do.”

“What has changed is you have come face to face with your anxiety of death. When you were young you were convinced you would live forever and now the dark universe has made you self-aware. But it is too late to start living now. You are enclosed by the realms of the universe. There is no escape from your own death, your own eternal nothingness. The universe has finally made you become alive.”

“I look at the stars. Back on Earth they were beautiful. Now they are anything but. Beauty is perception. It lies in the mind. It depends on the context. Like everything in life, it depends on interpretation and when I was convinced I would live forever the stars were beacons of hope; now they are hunters of reality.”

“It’s all subjective and it all depends on how the individual sees. These stars are beautiful to me. Everything is subjective. Beauty and horror, genius and tyranny. I could say something to a friend. He may find it insulting. I could come to the conclusion that it wasn’t. Hence we reach an impasse. The Nazi war criminals were the same. They believed what they were doing was correct because that’s what they were led to believe. If the Nazis had won the war Hitler would have been made a saint. That’s subjectivity.”

“How can you find beauty in such nothingness?” asked The Narcissist.

“What choice do I have? I can either live my last few moments in a calmness or I can spend it in anxiety over things I cannot control. Every time I look at the stars they make me dream.”

“Every time I look at them they make me sick,” said The Narcissist.

“You will die sick then.”

“Don’t we all?”

“You can still die with a smile despite the illness knowing that you lived your life on your own terms and did not yield to the influence of others.”

“How do you mean.”

“Just like we plan happiness, we live under the cloud of others opinions. We don’t live by our own hand. We live and perhaps die by the reason of others. There are very few free men alive or very few have ever lived. A philosopher

once said that far more men have died than ever lived. Many people are alive but not living if such a thing is possible.”

“I feel pretty far from being alive now,” said The Narcissist.

“In what way.”

“I was used to the whole nine to five, a few drinks with the lads, fine meals, nice women. Now I can only stare into the depths of the universe.”

“But now you are finally free.”

“From what?”

“Life itself.”

Week 33

“What do you want out of this destitute?” asked The Narcissist.

“How do you mean?” replied The Existential Nihilist.

“Why did you sign up for a certain death?”

“Don’t we do that with life anyway.”

“Well yes, but it’s just not as certain.”

“What do you mean? That there is a chance you will never die.”

“Well you never think you will die if you know what I mean.”

“And that is why we never live because we think we have all the time in the world left to live.”

“So why did you sign up?”

“I don’t know really. I had a yearning to go to space and to see the universe. It was my calling I suppose.”

“Could you not see it from Earth?”

“Only at night. But I always dreamed of seeing Earth from up here.”

“And now that you have seen it, what is your take?”

“The universe, life itself is so beautiful. Haunting but beautiful.”

“Don’t you want to go back home?”

“Do you know what I want. Not love, not friendship, not justice, not immortality. No I just want truth. I want to understand life.”

“At the expense of living it.”

“If you understand life you will live it regardless. I think you are just schooled on holidays and weekend booze filled parties. That is the “living” we are conditioned to come to accept. But living can be anything. It can be like earning money and going to parties or it can be the man who retreats from life altogether to find solace in nature.”

“Solitude. I don’t think there is much living in that.”

“Like I said. It all depends on one’s perception of what is living. One can only do what they enjoy, but first they must find out what they enjoy. They must find their truth.”

“So if you were given a chance to return to Earth now, would you take it?”

“Would you?”

“In a second!”

“I spent my life trying to fit in. I was pushed in this and that way by my peers. They wanted me to be someone I wasn’t. Thus, I came to live their life and not my own. On escaping that world, I have found myself in this world. I feel more at one in this world and that is all a man need do in life.”

“What, be at one with himself?”

“Yes, all man has to do is find himself in life and very few men do.”

“I found myself. My life was work and parties. I was comfortable doing that.”

“But were you living as you wished to live or as others wished you to live?”

“I think I was doing it freely.”

“Or were you just responding to the social pressures of society just as a flower responds to sunlight?”

“I can barely see the sun anymore. I wish I could at least see that. What are the chances that we will find a new home out of this?”

“Close to zero.”

“And yet you have reason to celebrate this?”

“Existence is the celebration. To be alive in a world that is forsaken is the greatest success of all.”

“I suppose you are right. But I still would prefer to have more certainty about the end.”

“The end is the same for us all.”

“Will any man survive this?”

“It looks like the end of mankind.”

“And we were just beginning to make leaps. Sad really. How everything we have achieved will just be forgotten. All will be lost in the abyss. Life will become nothing and man’s existence will erode.”

“Yes, everything we have ever achieved and every act of tyranny will vanish. It will be as if we never existed.”

“Do you not feel a sense of sadness with this?”

“What’s the point? Nothing I can do will change this fact. Man can change his life but not the will of the universe. One really has to understand how worthless we are. That we can see the universe does not give us the right to own it. We think that because we are intelligent that we have substance. But we are just animals like all other animals, only we can speak. If the universe proves one thing it is that we really are insignificant.”

Week 36

The asteroid crashed into Earth and knocked it slightly out of orbit. The power of its hit reverberated around the world. A huge tsunami of water and debris crossed the Atlantic Ocean and attacked the coasts of Europe and North America. The patrons of the ship looked on in horror through a satellite. They would look at the screen beaming images of a torn world. The horror was unimaginable. Trees burned, skyscrapers fell and man screamed in agony and yet God remained silent. The blue planet went from being clear and green to a violent red rage. The atmosphere was filled with a terrible gas that blocked out the sunlight and raised the temperatures inside the oven. Man and all his genius was dead and the patrons of the ship could only look on. They wondered about their families and questioned whether it was right to go and abandon them. The guilt was pouring through their conscience like a burst pipe. They were face to face with their own mistakes and they could not take it. The world was an inferno. It was hell and there was no escape from it except for those who were on the ship. Initially they had questioned whether it was right to abandon the Earth and all their friends and family, but on observing the carnage and brutal nature of the asteroid and what destruction it had brought with it, made them feel glad they escaped.

But their escape was only temporary. It was an illusion. It was a desperate attempt by man to prolong his existence. It was a futile attempt for they did not know what lay at the end of the worm-hole. They could only continue on like soldiers sent to the front line of a brutal war and ordered never to retreat from enemy fire. The ship thus motored on through the solar system and distanced itself from Earth and the sun. The sun slowly faded into oblivion as they sped through the horizon that was eternal space. There were only a few months left for them now unless they found a new shore that supported life. All they could do is watch the sands of time grow sparser. They had travelled now for eight months in the shadows of the solar system and had roughly about another eight months to live. They could not return home to Earth for it was now destroyed.

Even the mentally strongest could not run from the angst that would devour them. The Existential Nihilist was strong mentally and reminded herself of the worthlessness of life. The Scientist used the power of the atom to put life in perspective. The Priest turned to the divine to find inspiration. But The Narcissist was struggling. He had initially been selected because of his lack of apathy towards life and his fellow human beings. But as time moved on he

became irritated not about his family suffering on Earth but because his own life was nearing an end. From being unable to remain still to having sleepless nights, the guilt set in. He regretted his chosen path and that he abandoned his family for his own greed. He felt remorse for the first time in his life and yearned to be back with his family once again. He could not run from his demons. Back on Earth he abused drugs and visited prostitutes to quell his anxiety. Now he was engulfed by a universe that was unforgiving and indifferent. They were no avenues of escape. He was an addict going through withdrawal and he could not handle the change and the certainty of the nothingness.

The scientist had been trained for such a scenario where one individual might implode psychologically. In order to maintain the ship such a person or persons were to be placed in solitude for a period of time until they recovered. This is what happened to The Narcissist. The other three patrons rounded on him and carried him into the solitary confinement, where he was left to his own devices. He would scream and howl in agony as his mind unravelled before him. The guilt and the shame tortured his psyche. He cried and paced the room wishing to escape. "Some drink or cocaine," he would say repetitively to himself. Those were drugs that could make him forget life and go back to being normal. He was in the middle of a psychotic depression and the universe provided no way out. The darkness that took hold of him was relentless. He could only see himself and his own insignificance and it haunted him.

The others continued on without him. They could hear him yelling day and night as his mental state deteriorated rapidly. They had to be careful not to stock his room with sharp objects given that he was now a suicide risk. He wanted to escape the heavy-laden feeling and suicide became the only way out. The darkness became a beacon of light. One person guarded him at all times. His mood was so ravaged that he was unpredictable and the viability of the ship could be put at risk. The three others managed to engage day to day without him. They had their own problems but their conscience was kept pure. Some people just can't handle life and The Narcissist certainly couldn't handle the realities of the Universe. Of course, distraction from ones own mortality was vital. Some read and some talked to quell the existential hunger that ravaged their minds and what could one do? Death lay over the horizon and there was nothing that could be done about it.

Tears in Rain: The Date

Despite living on foreign soil for over three years, Sean was still profoundly lazy with regards what the general population would call interests in life. Meeting people took a lot out of him. He could meet them in small doses, like an alcoholic can only handle minute amounts of alcohol. To be frequenting with people day after day, was simply a big no with regards Sean and it took a while for him to realize himself. He couldn't do that level of stress and unpredictability. He demanded to be alone, because the loneliness was what he could control. Whereas Brian was starved through lack of money, Sean sometimes starved himself because he couldn't gather the energy to buy food. It was all too much time and momentum. He smoked, and drank coffee like a machine and survived on these two commodities. When they were in North Dakota, he was the one who said that using extra blankets rather than buying fuel was the way forward. Thankfully for his own sake he was over ruled by the other two. Bearing these traits in mind, to go on a date was something from another galaxy regarding Sean. He had never been on one before and the anxiety was crippling him, as it always did when he was faced with situations that warranted loss of control. He would walk into a room ten times and each time the anxiety would remain, if not be heightened. Such a malady is a disease. It haunts you and decides your fate.

He dressed up appropriately with a grey suit and a matching shirt and tie beneath. He did not feel comfortable in such a dress code. He felt that he had to act like a banker or accountant. He had to pretend to be confident, which is not confidence at all. He was nervous yet excited at the same time. Sibéal was dressed in an expensive red dress she had brought over on the trip from Ireland. She looked beautiful. Her hair was wet and combed straight. She looked stunning. Sibéal had got a new job as a dancer on top of her day to day job as a secretary. This enabled her to earn more income and she had left the boys alone in their apartment. She was finally getting on her feet in the world. The auditions were getting better and better and she felt she was close to a break. Life was suddenly beginning to smile for her.

"Sorry I was keeping you, I was doing my hair. I hope you haven't been waiting too long?" she joked as they made their way hand in hand to the restaurant by foot.

"All my life," remarked Sean.

She smiled at this revelation.

“I must say I’ve been looking forward to this all week,” said Sibéal.

“I’m 90% there then,” said Sean.

“How do you mean?”

“Well its psychology. First dates are all about making a good impression. It’s a bit like going to a job interview. You have to try and sell yourself. But if you already have made a good impression, you are half way there.”

“I thought you said 90%.”

“I was only making up numbers. The point being that if you already are impressed, I don’t have to do too much.”

“Who said I was impressed,” remarked Sibéal.

“Your body language did.”

“Well, you are handsome, smart and polite.”

“So are you.”

“So are lots of women. It’s rare that a guy is like that.”

“I’m too nice though, that’s why I’m a failure, at least that’s what Brian said about me.”

“Ah Brian is Brian. He’s probably jealous of you. One thing though, you don’t want to be like Brian.”

“He’s too much is he?”

“Too full of himself. Women like it of course, but he has to be full of himself because he wouldn’t get anywhere,” attested Sibéal.

“Well, no one would get anywhere without confidence.”

“You also get put in jail because of it.”

“That is very true.”

“Is that why you’re giving up on film?”

“It’s not for me. Too much meeting with people and too much pretending,” said Sean with a sigh.

“How do you mean pretending?”

“I am only pretending to be a director. I get up and get dressed and ask: What does a director do? And so I do what a director does. And I laugh when people laugh and cry when they cry, but truth be told, I don’t give a damn. I don’t feel anything. I am empty. It’s like I am an empty ship drifting in the wind. What’s that thing that happens when you die and your muscles tighten up?”

“Rigor Mortis I think,” quipped Sibéal.

“Yea that’s it. You’d swear I have that. When I am around people, particularly people I don’t know, I shut down. My system freezes and I just want to escape.”

“You cannot run from yourself though. You can go off farming like you say and be alone, but escaping yourself is a bit trickier.”

“I would love to live on that island. Away from everyone and you can just do what you want. And you’d watch the sun rise and set every day. Everybody needs some time on their own.”

“We all want that. Preferably with someone you like.”

“You have heard of Richard Feynman right?” asked Sean of Sibéal.

“Richard Feignman! Can’t say I have,” replied Sibéal with a wry smile as they walked joyfully along the path.

“He was a Nobel Laureate physicist and a genius among other things. He was once asked what was it like to win the Nobel Prize. He replied that the real prize in life was the courage to go your own way and to have the conviction to do so, despite the dissenting voices who say you are wrong. The prize was the curiosity in living the way you wish to live and loving who you wish to love. Of course, the trade-off is that you may die young like Kerouac and Cassady. Both only lived till they were fifty or so, but they really lived. So which is better? Do you want to live as much as you can when you are young or do you want to live longer? The majority of the world chooses the latter and they wake up on some frosty morning at sixty-five and realize they have wasted the better part of their life for an illusion called “the good life.” I don’t want to wake up and say it was wasted.”

“Maybe somewhere in between,” said Sibéal. “Perhaps if you find a compromise. Maybe work less and enjoy yourself more. There isn’t a template for how to live the ideal life. We know everything except how to live. But you just got to live and love and go where the river takes you. But regardless of the choices, I think that the right choice is the one you make.”

Sean smiled at this assertion. Sibéal was so smart and self-assured and did not get beaten down by the coldness of life. They reached the restaurant and took their seats. It was a fine place. A more modern restaurant rather than an old fashioned one. It had neon lights and a nice atmosphere. The calm tone was set with the red sombre halogen lights that dotted the ceiling.

“I don’t think I can do that Sibéal,” said Sean, continuing where they had left off.

“Why don’t you try at least. I am very likeable or so I am told.”

“I can’t give you what you want, what you deserve.”

“Why don’t you give yourself a chance. It could be like the Lion King. You will be Simba and I will be Nala.”

“You really do like that film,” said Sean smiling.

“It’s my favourite film. You can’t beat it.”

“Who’s Brian?”

“He can be the Meerkat,” remarked Sibéal laughing.

“Or the Warthog”

“What is your favourite film?”

“It would have to be Once Upon a Time in America. Probably the best film about life.”

“In what way?” asked Sibéal.

“Well most films, Hollywood films especially, paint life like a Monet, full of colours and beauty, when in fact it’s a Van Gogh, full of stress and hardship and occasional moments of fleeting splendour. It gives the best account of friendship and love and real life that I have seen. It is definitely one of the finest films ever made.”

“I must check it out.”

“Save it for a good moment. When you get married or the birth of your first child.”

She smiled and he smiled back and they looked at each other with a hesitant tone. They respected each other and that was important.

“I must say you are different,” said Sibéal changing the direction of the conversation.

“In what way?”

“Most guys are idiots. They treat you like a commodity. You are nice.”

“Like I said, too nice. Too quiet and too passive. Too don’t-really-care-about-life-much.”

“There are a lot of girls after you.”

“An exercise in futility.”

“You just want to be alone.”

“Exactly. Boredom or suffering? I think I will choose the boredom.”

“Which would you be choosing if you choose to be with me?”

He hesitated for a moment to think about such a question.

“I don’t know. I will have to think about that.”

“I was hoping you would say that, because either way it would have been an insult.”

“I’m getting better at this talking then. Usually I try to be nice, but end up insulting people.”

“I noticed that alright. Some blonde was talking to you one night and you bluntly told her something someday. God we were laughing afterwards. She wasn’t too impressed.”

“I just told her what I was feeling. I told her the truth,” said Sean.

“Sometimes you have to lie, well you have to do it a lot here,” said Sibéal.

“It’s been five years now and I realize that in order to get where you want, you have to be someone you are not and I can’t do that.”

“Yea, that’s an art. I have to be extra nice to so many people. Because if you fall out with one person you fall out with them all. Opinions are like viruses, they spread. For every one friend you lose, you actually lose about ten.”

“I think though that’s part of life. You can’t make everyone happy. That’s a problem with being famous. The world demands you behave a certain way.”

“I am beginning to think that alright. It’s better off being nothing. You can at least sleep peacefully at night. Having said that, we all need to make a living. We all must sell ourselves some way or another,” said Sibéal.

“Yea, we are all prostitutes in this world and in order to obtain the life we want, we have to do things we don’t want to do.”

“So true. It’s sad that we are all living the same lives.”

“Quiet lives of desperation. People work and they marry and they retire. That seems to be the path one must not diverge from. They spend their whole lives working and then retire into death. They retire and die two years later from a life of stress or else its boredom.”

“God I remember in school. We were basically told that if you didn’t go to college you were a failure and would amount to nothing. The “ambitious” students studied till two in the morning and went to college. That fear haunted me, the feeling of being judged poorly by others. But what was I thinking, who cares what they think of me. I may not have much, but I am free and I have my integrity. You don’t have to be the best to be ambitious in life. Sometimes success comes from the finer things in life.”

“Same with me. I came out of college knowing what I didn’t want, which was to have a degree. Just wanted one thing, to be alone. I can only be one thing, a loner. I wasted four years of my life, studying not to be an accountant, but to be part of the system. That’s what college does; it makes you want to be in the system,” remarked Sean.

“At least we had our fees paid. The Americans have to work when they come out of it, because they are so much in debt.”

“They are so blind, not the Americans, but the young. They don’t know what they are getting into when they sign up for work and marriage.”

“I take it you are never getting married then?” asked Sibéal.

“Never. I can’t cheat my freedom for that.”

“What’s the point going on this date then?”

“Ah, well, you are nice.”

“So would you date?”

“You don’t want to date me Sibéal. I’m mad. I’m not like others. I could say I was going to the shop and I might disappear to Alaska or something for a month or two. That whole Lion King thing probably won’t work.”

“But nothing ever works. Nothing turns out how you planned. We have all these dreams of marriage and money and big houses, but it never turns out the way we expect. I suppose that’s what makes it good and bad.”

“I can’t do it.”

“Well at least let me invite you back to my apartment tonight.”

“That I can do. But before the night ends, I want to play you one of my tunes. Chopin Nocturne Op 9 No. 2.”

“What are you going playing it with?” asked Sibéal.

“The Steinway Piano behind you.”

Sibéal looked behind and saw a big piano.

“God, I never even saw that.”

He got up and sat down at the piano and paused for a while, pacing himself for the war. Sibéal was facing away from him and could not see him outright, but only hear the tension in the air. The other people in the restaurant paused and took notice. He began to play, but not Chopin. It was Elton Johns “Can You Feel The Love Tonight,” from the film the Lion King. Sibéal was broken mentally upon hearing it and a tear came to her eye. She had fallen for Sean.

They walked hand in hand back to the apartment in the dew of the fresh air and the young night. It was a night that could only happen when you are young. The

stars shone brightly as they laughed and cuddled and discussed the fallacies of life and living. Maybe they didn't say it outright, but they both felt privileged and lucky to exist in such a world at such a time and be in each other's arms. They saw the wars in the Middle East and the starvation and poverty of Africa and both realized how lucky they were to be where they were in life. They reached her apartment and opened the door. The tension started to build.

"So.....what happens now....." said Sean on entering her apartment.

"What happens now, is we go into the bedroom," said Sibéal taking him by his hand and escorting him into the bedroom. He was nervous and fragile. His hands shook. She turned on some music and started to dance seductively for him. My god she looked beautiful. As she leaned in to kiss him he pushed her away. Sibéal was slightly taken aback by this and caught unawares.

"Sorry Sibéal I can't do this."

"What do you mean you can't do it?"

"I just don't feel comfortable."

"Don't you like me?"

"No, no, of course I like you, it's just...."

"It's just what?"

"It's just..."

"Just what! What then.... why won't you be with me.... what is it with you?"

"I just can't do it..... I'm going, I can't do this."

"Fine go, go you creep, that's all you are, a CREEP."

He was forced out the door and sent walking alone in the dim moonlight. The stars had suddenly become sad. Life had suddenly become much tougher to crack. The air was thicker and hungrier. He went into an all-night coffee shop and ordered a cappuccino and sat and contemplated his life. What would he do now? He sat and stared and began to smile. He wondered what he had done. He thought he had made a mistake? The cappuccino suddenly tasted bitter. He wondered why he had bought it.

Sean walked calmly out of the coffee shop and into the cool night. He took a casual stroll in any which direction. He was going nowhere. It was like he was stranded in the wilderness of Siberia, with no bearing to guide him. He stared into the clear sky, with its stars twinkling and contemplated his next move. He wondered about the enormity of the universe and how insignificant he was. His career in Hollywood was finished and he had to return home. He came to a bridge and stopped and looked deep into the ice-cold water that lay under it. He could see the reflection of the night sky and himself in it. He wondered what it would be like to drown, to have the water pump into your lungs and choke you. He thought of Sibéal and wondered what she was doing right now. He smiled when he thought of Brian. He was probably getting drunk and high in some pub. He needed to escape he said to himself. He needed to get away from it all again.

He thought of Sibéal and her delicate smile. She had such a vibrant smile and that made him smile too. He looked out across the bridge and gazed into the night stars. People were getting on with their lives. They were crossing the bridge and walking towards the city centre. Across the bridge lay his future but he was a long way from home, from his farm. The dream was deflated. He had come to Hollywood young and full of energy and he was now shattered and tired. He was broken by the city and boy had he tried to succeed. But he just didn't have it. Whatever they wanted, he did not possess. All across America, youths had dreams and aspirations, from Long Island to Seattle. All these young people had hopes and dreams of a better future. This was the world. It was full of young hopeless souls who tried to live under the sun and enjoy their existence while it lasted. This made him smile when he thought of it. He began to see the bigger picture. How many young aspiring directors were in America alone? How many all desired the same thing and how many actually made it? It was a competitive world out here. But at least he enjoyed himself and didn't take the failures too seriously. He had some good times. But it wasn't to be. Ireland his home was calling for him. The great city of Limerick was calling out for him. "I am a long way from Limerick now," he said to himself gazing into the waters of the river. The great old city of Limerick was thirsting for his return. It was the best city in the world. It was incomparable as a city. Limerick was the city L.A. wished it was he said to himself. He looked around one last time at L.A. and made his way across the stony bridge as the night settled in and the mint stars came out. He was leaving it all behind including his friends Sibéal and Brian. He was going home and on his own. He had failed but he was in a

way glad at failing. He could now go home and try to piece together his life. He crossed the bridge and so began the next chapter of his life.

Death is the Hunter

35

People analyse everything except themselves and that is why they are blind.

One of the best things you will ever learn is your own limitations. So much hurt and pain can be avoided through such knowledge.

Success has its demons. It is only when we lose everything do we realize who we are.

We know everything about our profession, but we know nothing about ourselves. You can learn a lot by analysing others, but you can learn more by analysing yourself. Tragically to say that I built my whole philosophy through self-analysis.

You want to mature? Keep asking yourself why is there something and not nothing? In your darkest hour you must ask that question.

Probably the most important human freedom: the ability to react to what was done to you.

Insecurity invites suffering, but we also suffer to mature.

Nobody wants to understand what makes society and hence them function. It is kind of a limitation of society in that we need someone else to point out what we are doing wrong. You would think, given our intelligence, that we would be able to analyse ourselves and deduce where we are going astray.

So much of human angst boils down to the fact that we want to be liked.

You are a mystery; each day you learn something new about yourself and the world. Maturity is a craft you never master. You are always improving and learning and striving to become a better person.

We are so used to equating wealth with happiness that we cannot see that it often yields misery too.

You can be who you damn well want to be in solitude, but for many, solitude does not supply enough validation. We hunger to be seduced, but never by existence itself. Why not let life seduce you?

We are free, yet all our dreams are the same.

If you keep looking in the mirror you will be blind to the beauty around you. You cannot see the universe when you stare at yourself. As long as you focus on yourself, you can never be happy.

If your attitude is wrong you are just going to waste your most prized asset, which is time.

The trick is not to break away from the herd, but rather to accept that you are part of it. Your only competition in life is yourself.

What I have learned is that it is those who can live in solitude that are most happy in life.

For the insecure, living the dream life is showing off to everyone that they are living the dream life.

The paradox of want: The eagerness to be rich only makes you perceive yourself as poor; the drive to be beautiful only makes you see yourself as ugly; the yearning to be happy, only prolongs your unhappiness; you cannot live by wanting to live. Want, is the source of so much pain. To be in want, is to reject yourself.

When you see everyone as a journalist, you will start to do things differently.

The pianist, the conductor, the cellists, the violinists, they are all replaceable, except the composer; there are and will be a thousand princes, but there is only one Ludwig Van Beethoven. That is what one must strive to do in life, become a composer.

36

What psychiatry truly is, is regulation. Anything that conflicts with or does not contribute to the economic system must be treated. Nearly 800 million people worldwide are on anti-depressants. Why not change the economic system rather than medicate these people?

Mental illness is the economic systems failure and not the individuals. One in four worldwide, that is 2 billion people, will suffer some sort of mental illness in their life and yet we continue to change the individuals themselves and not the economic system.

Often what is actually wrong with people is that they fully believe there is something wrong with them. That their life is not perfect causes them to wallow in self-pity.

You will find with serious mental illness, that a lot of the suffering is not caused by the suffering of the illness but of the label of the illness itself.

Are the mentally ill out of sync with society? Or is society out of sync with the mentally ill?

The narcissist will often mutilate their bodies just to make people they do not actually care about, like them.

If everyone is special then no one is special.

I see so many. They wear that brand of clothing, to be seen wearing it; they drive that brand of car, to be seen driving it; they work that job, to be seen working in it; they marry and have two children, to be seen married and having two children. There is a word to sum up such a mentality: narcissism.

You cannot separate the society from the individual. Society has a huge bearing on how individuals that make up that society function and think. That is why I discuss sociology with respect to existentialism.

We are imprisoned by interpretation, by what other people think of us as they look at us.

There is so much pattern because people are convinced that following the pattern automatically leads to happiness.

Everything you are accustomed to on this planet, is an illusion that will not be found anywhere else in the universe.

37

If you don't love someone when they are nothing, you do not love them at all.

You have to separate a relationship and romance. People think they are one. They are not. Relationships have only been romanticized in the last 100 years. And they could easily make solitude romantic. They could make it sexy.

Sex is instinctive. The dream life is not. It is a social construct, implanted in your mind.

The narcissistic female is a genius, at being a woman.

My conclusion about love: it exists, but you must read the fine print.

That you cannot dare criticize true love says it all really. What else can you not criticize? In Muslim countries you cannot criticize the prophet. In North Korea you cannot criticize its supreme leader. You cannot criticize those two things because they are built out of lies. The same with true love. You cannot criticize it because those who believe in it do not want their illusions challenged.

When a man likes a woman, it is sex; when a woman likes a guy, it is sex and image.

This obsession with love and that there is one person out there for you to find, is the most glaring sign of insecurity and immaturity. Never ever beg for someone.

Marriage leads to children; prostitution does not. That is why the system champions love and demonizes prostitution. It protects itself.

If it is money that makes someone interested in you, they have no interest in you.

I would wager that more men are philosophically smart than women. More men see the universe. They see past their social conditioning that was enacted when young.

Love is in ways, especially if the love is narcissistic, industrial scale prostitution. "You give me the dream life that I can show off to everyone, I will give you my body."

Children are like debt. They force you to work. If you don't have debt and children, your life becomes much easier.

For better or worse, till death do us part, unless you make me look bad in front of others.

When a relationship becomes an accessory, it becomes toxic.

There is as much a sociological basis for love as there is an evolutionary basis.

They have to hype up true love. That it is natural and instinctive. If they started telling you the truth, that it takes maturity to actually be able to love, fewer people would buy into it.

I remember reading about a woman on the internet who had read an article about a husband and father that murdered his family out of the blue. The woman who read the article was then worried that someone she was married to could do the same to her. But it never dawns on this said woman, just don't get married and she would not have to worry about such a scenario. This is something I get at. Marriage is a given for some people. The option of not getting married is not on the table. They simply have to get married and then go from there. Why do most people think like this? They do because that is how they are indoctrinated.

You don't have to get married and have two children.

Insecure people leverage it all on one person.

The ideal man for the female is a narcissist that is not narcissistic. They want a confident man because they want to be seen with a confident man.

Unfortunately, a lot of confident men are narcissists.

If there is one thing that inhibits you, it is conversation.

38

“We forfeit three-fourths of ourselves in order to be like other people.” - Arthur Schopenhauer

39

Children are the cruellest, most violent and most brutal dictators in existence.

The longer we associate with someone, the harder it is to extract ourselves from that person or persons. The deeper we go, the more difficult it is to climb out. It is very easy to break up with someone we have only dated for three months. It is much harder to break up with someone we have been married to for ten years.

The same applies to friendship.

The most important teaching done by the schools and colleges is not done by the teachers, but by the students themselves.

They tell us what we cannot do, but they also tell us what we have to do.

The indoctrination is so good that no one even asks why they are forced to be educated when young. Education is just accepted as necessary and without question.

You can only be who you want to be in absolute solitude, but solitude is not in the habit of bestowing reverence.

What builds the criminals empire is also his downfall: people.

It does not matter what happens, for as long as educating children together remains, marriage and family will remain. Children teach each other; they regulate each other; they master each other; they socially condition each other. Children are the fathers of society. The most amazing thing is not the system, but rather that no one can see the system.

Most are resigned to mediocrity because they cannot forsake love for anything else.

If you erred in life up, you would not care what the government thought of you. But you would care about what your family and friends thought of you.

Children are the bludgeoners of the democratic state.

I cannot help but think that narcissism is the price we pay for a functioning society. They do not want geniuses. They want children.

At the same time as you are being educated you are also being tyrannized.

Determine education and you determine society.

They want people to be insecure because insecurity leads to marriage and children.

Solitude is the father of immortality.

Children are the fathers of society; humiliation is their tool.

In this day and age of fame hungry nobodies, the people you should listen and follow are the ones that do not want to be famous.

You are absolutely oblivious to the realization of what twenty years with other children has on your behaviour. God could come down from the sky and tell people that if they want to be happy, they should live alone. But as long as children are educated together, it would not matter.

You are the leading expert on being you.

The mass murder culture we witness in American society is really caused by the educational system. The same method that makes an adolescent self-harm is the same method that makes a child pull the trigger of an assault rifle. It is other children in the classroom that create these monsters.

“Freedom is the power to choose our own chains.” - Jean Jacques Rousseau

40

We all excel at something, be it idleness or criminality.

No matter how good you are, or how good you think you are, there is and always will be, someone who is better than you.

History only remembers the generals and not the soldiers who die on the killing fields.

The regulation done by the government is considered tyranny; the regulation done by your best friends is considered life.

They say god is watching us. No one is watching us, not even the universe.

Build your empire with lambs, they get eaten; build your empire with lions and they eat you.

Ideas are more dangerous than terrorists. Terrorists destroy families; ideas will destroy the world.

One of the most valuable skills you can possess in today's world is your ability to pretend.

People spend so much time reading that their thoughts are the thoughts of the journalist that wrote for the paper. Too little reading inhibits you, but equally so does too much.

You would have to feel sorry for the celebrities. They are either absolutely adored or absolutely despised, and I don't know which is worst.

It is not death that kills you but life.

The equation is simple. If you cannot bear the solitude, there is a good chance you are unhappy.

What those music and reality shows demonstrate is that people want fame for fame's sake and they want it now.

We all lack value; we are all worthless; we exist as if we do not exist. This should be paradoxically the reason to live, as your death will be futile; a drop of water in the Pacific Ocean. That life lacks any intrinsic value is precisely the reason why you should live. You lack value alive and equally so when you are dead.

The narcissist's happiness is herd driven. They want to be happy because they want to show everyone how happy they are.

"As long as a man feels that he is the most important thing in the world he cannot really appreciate the world around him." - Carlos Castaneda

Fear has been used down through the ages to discipline society. The Nazis used it to incite the German people into conforming. This fear is still evident in western society of today. We inculcate society into A) being afraid of wasting their lives through not getting married and having children. And B) we inculcate them into being afraid of being laughed at.

Winter

Death is the Hunter

This is it. The end. I cannot go on. I am now famous and I hate it. I think I will throw myself in front of a bus. I cannot bear them all laughing at me. Yes, I must kill myself.

Tears in Rain: Old Age

The world had changed and changed for the better. It was now nearly fifty years since that fateful moment when the trio went their separate ways. Sean had returned to Ireland and set up his farm, where he lived the predictable life. Sibéal had remained in LA and had fallen in love. Brian too had remained in L.A. and died a young man. The landscape was no longer a place of youth and delirious energy, for old age had now caught up with them. Where once they were full of passion, now their hearts were laden with sadness. The grey hairs had finally revealed themselves. The wrinkles had creased the once firm skin. The maladies crept up on them day after day. When they were young life was so easy. You never got sick, you slept well and without trouble and everything happened so much better and with so much more energy. Old age had attacked the once boisterous characters. They could no longer move freely or dance or lose themselves in the delirium of sex and music. Alcohol had to be avoided, cigarettes were completely off the menu and the enjoyment was limited to social gatherings for grand-children. Sean was chauffeured around by a crutch; his hips were arthritic from years of dancing and drinking. He was now bald and was thin. Sibéal was a shadow of what she once was. Her beauty, grace and youth had left her. Her hair was short, thin and grey. Her face, once a beacon of such beauty, was wrinkled. Her eyesight had dimmed and she had to wear glasses.

I suppose it happens to all. You wake up some morning and on looking in the mirror, you make a rather alarming discovery that life has flashed by and where you were once a young person, now you are no longer. Life is cruel. The greatest pain is when you are young and so engrossed in being young, that you are convinced that you will remain young forever. Our youth is wasted on this premise. We are sworn by the mirrors and reflections that it will last for all eternity. We are deceived. So one finds that one can no longer get about as freely as you could in the past. One can no longer see as far as one once could. One can no longer dance with such youthful glory. We gaze at the stars questioning when will be our day of reckoning when we depart this great planet. The dance is for the young.

Before he died Brian had failed in Hollywood. He had just wanted money to survive and live an enchanting life. He had continued to work as a garbage collector and had never made a dent in the Hollywood scene. Before his death, he had changed. He came to realize the futility of it all. He had gradually come

to understand the philosophy of Sean, that life was incomprehensible really and that chasing money and materialism was a waste of resources and more importantly time. But all the drink and drugs finally caught up with him one sunny day in his late fifties and while casually taking a stroll in the park with his dog he got a stroke. The last thing he ever saw in this world was the blue sky, the same blue sky under which he spent so many wonderful times, in the sun scorched streets of L.A. But slowly his brain was starved of oxygen and he slipped into a coma with his pet dog remaining by his side. An ambulance was called but it was too late for the damage had been done twenty years earlier. Brian Fitzgerald and all he had achieved in life was no more.

Sibéal had sold herself when she got married. She traded in freedom for financial security. Initially it was great. The kids were young and so was she and she played with them by the beach every day. And she would wake up on Saturday mornings thinking about how good life was and how good it was to exist. But gradually she aged, and her dancing feet became feeble and she could no longer wake up with a smile. The children went from kids to adolescence pretty fast and they had lives of their own and she saw her own youth in them and shed a tear or two. Then came the grand-children and she realized how broken life really is. She turned to alcohol. One glass of vodka became two and two became five and so on. "If only we could be born old and die young," she would say. Like Sean she would get up early in the morning and take long strolls down by the beach, with a gentle breeze blowing and the morning sun slowly climbing out of the shadows and wonder about the life she once had.

"Thank you all for coming here today," said her husband toasting the air with his champagne.

The party was to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Sibéal's marriage to her banker husband. They had met on a starry night. Some many years later they were still in each other's arms, devoted and caring. But it wasn't a committed or honest love. It was a love borne out of financial reward and a more profitable image. They liked each other but did not love each other. Sibéal knew deep in her heart that she did not love him. They were great friends no question but not great lovers. They had travelled the world together before they got married and visited such splendid places like Cambodia and Rio De Janiero. They had held each other's hands, and laughed and contemplated the future with a family and all the while there were lingering doubts about the uncertainty of it all. Even when they finally got to see Manhattan in the winter, with the snow falling and

the temperature near zero and long trips up Madison Avenue, Sibéal still felt a faint panic in her heart, a feeling that something was not right. It was outside the Rockefeller building with the Christmas lights lit up and the carnival New York atmosphere in full flight, in the early darkness that he proposed to her and she was taken by surprise and jumped for joy. So they went back to their Hotel near Madison Avenue and made love and all was well with their lives. Fast forward a few years and they had children and life was good in California and the sun was always shining and America was always so good to them.

“My beautiful wife, yes she still is beautiful, and I am extremely grateful that you have all made it. I am seeing people I haven’t seen in a while, which is understandable as I am a busy financial man. I am only messing! Thank you all though for coming, and enjoy the music and the party and the food of course.”

The party took place in their apartment complex in the Florida Keys. It was full of the next generation of youth who were given a chance to seize the day and make a life worth living. Sibéal looked on at the numerous beautiful women who dotted the party. A group of immaculately dressed models mingled and chatted about the problems of the day. They were dressed exquisitely and joined by fashionable men.

“So how are the children?” a fellow party goer asked of Sibéal.

“Well, Steven is over in Dubai at the moment and Stefani is working in New York.”

“God, both very successful.”

“This is how chance rolled.”

“It’s a fantastic party and great occasion. What a view of the ocean as well.”

“Yea I always enjoyed looking at the ocean,” said Sibéal in a sad tone.

They heard the chatting of the fellow patrons. They mumbled and laughed and occasionally shouted and danced in shallow undertones. They mingled profusely and ate from the buffet. It was early in the afternoon and the sun shone like a flame in the night. Two glamorous models chatted with each other about clothes and men and jobs and enjoyed the fine champagne as well.

“Sorry to interrupt, but who is that old man there?”

“I don’t have a clue. He looks kind of lost.”

They laughed at this ragged figure who was old and broken and stood by himself at the balcony, staring into the fine view that was life. Sibéal then came in and talked with them.

“Sibéal, we were just saying, who is that man there?”

“Who’s that now?”

Sibéal looked around to see where they pointed to. She saw a shadow perched on the balcony but could not make out who it was. She motioned to put on her glasses and on doing so, a tear came to her eye. The man, the lonely derelict man was Sean, who she had not seen in years. She broke away from the people and made her way towards the old man. She saw how much he had changed. From being the most handsome man she had laid eyes on, to being thin and grey. She was sad. She could hardly bear what she saw as she approached him and instead of greeting him, she passed by him quietly and plodded down to the beach and sat on a bench and wondered greatly about a life that should have been. She was seated for nigh on ten minutes when Sean approached and stood beside the seat. He did not sit down near her. He looked at the beautiful ocean and all its luxury. The scene was wonderful.

“I wasn’t sure you would come. You used always turn me down.”

“You know me. I always hated going to parties.”

“I was kind of hoping you wouldn’t come.”

“Why?”

“Because the last time I saw you, you were young and handsome.”

“Now I am old and grey. It happens to us all, the worst of us, the best of us.”

“How have you been? What have you been doing all these years?”

“Going to bed early. Getting up early. Got myself a farm and lived a quiet life,” said Sean with a smile.

“That farm! I remember that while we were all dreaming of fame and money, you just wanted a farm. Fame or a farm?”

“It turned out good. I didn’t have money, but I was happy.”

“Alone!”

“Yes, I was content alone.”

“You could have had all this you know, you could have had me,” she said gazing into the sea and beach alike.

“Sibéal I couldn’t give you the love you deserved. I didn’t have it in me. You seem to have done well haven’t you.”

“From the outside yes. You would think I have done well, but inside I was suffering. I rarely saw my husband. He was busy working and I was left alone, like you.”

“That makes two of us.”

“Yea, except I had to look after the children.”

“How are they?”

“They take after their father. It’s all money and success and image to them. I could never understand your thinking, when we were young. While everyone wanted success you wanted.....”

“Freedom. I had read too much Kerouac. That was my problem. Looking back, maybe I should have enjoyed myself a bit more and not worried as much.”

“I should have done the same. God, we never realize when we are young how good it is. It passes by and then suddenly you can’t move as quickly or dance as beautifully. It’s amazing we have come this far. You know I have always wanted to say sorry for what I said to you back then.”

“Don’t worry. The things we do in the moment. That defining moment. You were better off living with confidence than be like me and live the boring life.”

“When we were young, we were convinced that we could take on the world. But as you grow up you find it is the world that takes on you.”

“How good it was to be young. There was no stress. Life was simple. You got up and headed off to school and enjoyed yourself. As you get older the stress increases. Life becomes about work and relationships.”

“It was great to be young alright. It seems like another world now, looking back.”

“And you think you will live forever. You think you will never grow up and die.”

“It’s the great deception. We live as if we will live forever.”

“I remember in my teens going off to dances and meeting boys. I remember in college and after college and how we were so full of life’s intoxication. It couldn’t get any better. Now I can only look at the younger generation and shed a tear. If only I could be young again,” said Sibéal.

“Someday you just wake up and realize you are old. You never see it. You cannot plan for it. You must just go with it.”

There was a silence.

“Did you keep in touch with Brian?” asked Sibéal.

“Not really. We all kind of drifted apart.”

“He died too young, but at least he would say he lived.”

“Oh he lived. I remember waking up one morning in L.A. and he had a plethora of women in the apartment. He brought them all back and let them sleep on the floor!”

“While he got the bed,” laughed Sibéal.

“Nobody could share his bed with him. God those were the good times alright. Now I can barely get out of bed without help.”

There was another silence. They could hear the waves crashing against the shoreline and the wind whistled in their ears.

“I remember thinking about all the movies we went to see in L.A. How many films did we watch?” said Sibéal.

“Hundreds I would say.”

“And how many were good?”

“Very few,” retorted Sean smiling.

“Why did you sit through them then?”

“Because I wanted to be with you. I wanted to make you happy.”

Sibéal smiled.

“Sean, I gave you every chance I could possibly give and you turned me down.”

“I know, I know. I’m sorry. I just didn’t have the strength.”

“I remember thinking alright you must have liked me for we saw the Lion King about six or seven times.”

“That was your favourite, wasn’t it?” remarked Sean.

“It still is. I was watching it with my grand-daughter the other day. She loved it. And all the time I couldn’t help but think of us when we used watch it together.”

“It was good to be young alright.”

“Sean, there isn’t a day gone by, that I don’t think of what my life could have been or should have been.”

“I was afraid of living Sibéal. I was afraid of being talked about. It’s not that I didn’t want to live but rather I feared the consequences of living.”

“Sean, you only get one roll of the dice in this world. There is no second chance. There is no other life than this. I tried to live, at least I can say that.”

“I found my comfort in my own loneliness. It was a quiet but content world,” he said.

“And to think of what we could have had.”

“I think about that every day.”

“So do I,” said Sibéal. “Why did you always want to escape Sean?”

“I don’t know. It must have been the anxiety and the pressure that accompanied living. I couldn’t live under such duress. The weight of expectation would drag me down.”

“Relationships are tough alright but they can be rewarding. There were times in my marriage that I questioned my decisions. Sometimes it got tough. But I soldiered on.”

“I don’t think I would have been cut out for being married. I enjoyed my alone time. I needed some time by myself. I sleep better knowing that I am nothing.

Nothing is something that can never be taken from you. I failed at everything in life: Relationships, success, enjoyment. I failed at everything except failing; I was damn good at that.”

“You always were the strange one. I mean in a good way. You were too nice Sean. Sometimes you can be too nice and get taken advantage of,” said Sibéal.

“Ah yea. But I’d rather be nice than be a criminal.”

“True.”

“I wasn’t the man you wanted. I was cold and unresponsive. You remember. I would freeze when around people. You needed a man who would carry you through the world, not one that would follow you.”

“I remember that great quote by Albert Camus about friendship. We could have just been friends you know. We could have spent many a day walking beside each other through the forests and by the silent canals. We could have just enjoyed each other’s company without saying much. Isn’t that what love is?”

“I couldn’t do that. I don’t know what you wanted Sibéal but whatever it was, I couldn’t give it to you.”

“And so what did you do with your life then?” she asked.

“I tended to my farm and kept a low profile. I kept out of trouble and lived the simple life.”

“I thought by marrying, I was doing the same,” quipped Sibéal.

“How do you mean?”

“I thought marriage was the only way. But at some point along the road I realized there are many ways to live.”

“Do you feel sorry to have made that choice?” asked Sean.

“Yes and no. I just wish I could have stayed younger a bit longer.”

“People, I think, don’t realize that nothing ever goes the way you expect and what can you do, but just go with it and smile I suppose,” remarked Sean.

“True, but I just think I wasted it on what others wanted me to do, rather than what I wanted to do. I should have gone off and travelled and so on. Instead I married.”

“The choices we make in life don’t matter, for it all ends in regret anyhow.”

“I have always wondered about what you told me, remember, Boredom or Suffering. I know I chose the boredom, but what did you choose by not choosing me? Remember how I asked you that.”

Sean paused for a minute, looking at the horizon as the cool and calm breeze brushed against his face. A young woman and her beau could be seen walking by them down at the shoreline. They danced with each other with such youthful passion. The old and defeated Sibéal and Sean could only look on.

“I guess I chose both of them....” he said quietly.

There was another silence as they both remained fixated on the young couple throwing their arms around one another.

“It took me thirty years to think up a reply to that question,” he exclaimed smiling.

“So you have been thinking about me then?”

“Yea, all the time, wondering what could have been.”

“But now we are old and grey. Life is so cruel,” she said with a wry smile.

“But a cruel world is better than no world.”

“If only you could be born old and die young I suppose.”

“Or born young and stay young..... like a turtle.”

“They don’t grow old do they?”

The young couple ran into the waves and jumped and swam around. Sean and Sibéal could hear the yelling and joyous shouting. They screamed of youth and how good it was to be young.

“No, but they end up dying anyhow from too much freedom. It doesn’t matter how you live, free or in chains, you will die.”

“What was the farm like?”

“Oh just a couple of cows and sheep. Nothing much, but I enjoyed it. Getting up early. I loved it. I had to starve myself some weeks. I didn’t have enough money. I still don’t,” said Sean.

“But you have your freedom, and that is all that matters.”

There was a stony silence. The young couple drenched from the water, left the sea and continued wandering the beach. They drifted in and out. You could tell they were madly in love.

“I think, I think it is time to go now,” said Sean slowly moving away.

“You left me standing alone a long long time ago and now you do the same.”

They both laughed at this suggestion.

“You deserved better than me! For what it is worth and it’s not worth much now Sibéal, you were so beautiful.”

She smiled kindly as she remained seated and gazing at the sea.

“Will I see you again?” she asked.

“Hopefully,” he said, “hopefully.....”

They remembered being young and living in L.A. and how good it was to be alive and how fortunate they were to have lived such lives. They thought about how fast it went by. Life just dissipated before their eyes like a flash of lightening between two grand moments of infinite darkness. Now they were a shadow of their former selves.

He walked off slowly on the beach. The faint sound of The Beatles “Yesterday” could be heard. He could see the couple in the distance, slowly fading over the horizon. He looked back at Sibéal, as she was seated and continued walking. He thought about how beautiful she looked when they were young. He remembered her dancing and being free. He wondered how she had changed so much. He looked up at the sky and saw a comet crashing into the blue atmosphere. The sun melted against it. This is the end he thought as he collapsed onto the sand, with his hand pinned against his chest and a sharp pain raced through his veins. This is the end he thought as the comet burnt up. “Let it be,” he thought, let it be.

The Abyss of Nothing: Part IV

There is no rain in space. No clouds either. All that exists is a darkness dotted with stars that are hundreds of light years away. They looked at the video of Earth burning. The asteroid had wiped out the planet. The animals, the buildings, the rivers and the mountains had disappeared. They all perished in this nuclear force collision that had burned Earth as pools of lava flowed like tears across its circumference. The spaceship had beamed across the galaxy through a worm hole and had inadvertently attached itself to an invisible black hole. They were suspended in time and time was dead. They were glued to this force and heading nowhere. This gravity had caught them in a web and they could not escape. No one can escape the might of a black hole. They could not feel its force nor see it, but it adjusted their lives. They needed it as much as they loathed it, for they could not survive without it. They could not get anywhere. It was just a matter of surviving for as long as possible until the supplies or the air ran out. They were on a path to infinity; the destination was nothingness.

It took madness to comprehend the madness. The two-dimensional life of work and relationships was now dead. That dream had suffocated into the vast universe. It was how it always was and always will be: Every man for himself. In space there was no such thing as America. The American dream of endless currency and sun dripped holidays was dead. It was an illusion that was readjusted in the deepest pit of the conscience. Now our pioneers were face to face with death and they had nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. They could only look into the dark horizon and see their lives run before them like a train scorching through a tunnel. The universe spoke to them in a foreign language. It castigated them for wasting their beautiful lives on meaningless agendas. But these words of wisdom were far too late for the hour glass was near empty and the end was near. They would gaze into the deepest confines of time and they could paradoxically see half their reflection on the thick glass panes and wondered what happened when they died? What had become of their existence? Why had they thrown it all away for nothing? Now they were staring into the jaws of nothing and could not escape. It is said that man can escape everything except his own anxiety; he cannot escape himself. Now in space the escapes were non-existent. They had no enemy except boredom. It haunted their shadows. It made them finally realize themselves and their essence. But it was

too late. The black hole had caught them and they could but only bend to its will.

Life was hanging in the balance. Would they find immortality in another world? Or was this the only life that existed? They would find out soon. All roads in their life had led to this moment. What becomes of man when the light in his eyes finally extinguishes? Does another world beckon or is it condemnation to the abyss of nothingness? They sat and pondered this great paradox. How did the universe spring into life in the first place? Why did they exist? Surely there must have been a maker or another species that gave birth to life on Earth. Imagine if there was nothing. No stars, no galaxies, no planets, no blue skies, no sunsets, no animals and no man. Imagine if space had never existed and that there was just an inert darkness, that no life had ever existed. That man had never been born and the light of the stars had never flashed before our grateful retinas. Dream that there was emptiness, just an infinite darkness that engulfed the universe, that there was no space and no time. Imagine such a world and then you begin to be glad to exist even though you are mortal and subject to death. Existence no matter how cruel is better than no existence at all. “Why is there something,” they asked “and not nothing?”

These were the ultimate questions posed by the prospect of death. These were the questions that sang in the synapses of their brains. What if man was blind, would the world exist as we know it? Some thought that it would have been better if they were blind for then they could not see their own mortality. The very sense that gave so much to their existence was the very one that made them recoil in fear. The universe for all its beauty also gave birth to nightmares and this was the final nightmare. All they could do was see out this last stage and hope for the best although they knew deep within the fabric of their soul that this was the only island of life and no other shore shone so bright and so brilliant. They slowly awaited their demise. Nothingness beckoned and they could only meet it head on and with a smile. It was time to die; time to die.

“Let us pray. God will save us. If not in this life, in the next one,” said The Priest.

“Your optimism is commendable, but don’t lie to yourself. We are doomed. It is just a question of whether you want it quickly or slow and painfully! Do we venture into the unknown or do we settle for a common death?”

“We only have enough oxygen by my calculations for a few more hours.”

“God is coming. This is the return.”

“Where are we going? Every day I have asked that question. Now we shall find out,” said The Existential Nihilist.

“We will fall into the arms of God.”

“No offense, but you are sounding about as rational as an insane man,” exclaimed The Existential Nihilist. “Even if there was a god, I doubt he would care. If he cared, we would still be on Earth and there would be no suffering.”

“Where is God? Where is he?” asked The Scientist.

“Have faith.”

“Faith is nothing more than a free anti-depressant for the poor. Despite all the pilgrimages, Earth is burning and we are dying. Some God no doubt. I doubt if we were not in such a desperate position that we would believe in God.”

“If we lived forever would we need him?” asked The Existential Nihilist.

“The only thing we can do is watch ourselves slowly die.”

“Ok, can you contact any other ships for help?” asked The Priest.

“They are probably light years away from us and besides they wouldn’t go near a black hole,” said The Scientist.

“It all ends in regret, everything you do in life, perhaps life itself most of all.”

“Maybe you are right. Maybe my life of devotion was a waste,” exclaimed The Priest.

“What does it matter, be there a God or be there no God. Life would still be the same regardless and we would still die.”

“This can’t be happening. Why can’t we get to another home?” asked The Priest.

“We are stuck to this black hole and besides the nearest home is so far away. This is our home,” said The Scientist.

“There is no light here. All I see is the darkness of the universe. God, I really am doomed. What about all the mistakes I have made? Will I be punished?”

“Which would you prefer: Torture or nothingness, both are forms of torture it must be said. That’s why so many people fall into the divine. They cannot stand the thought of not existing. The nothingness destroys their being and leads them into the arms of God...” said the Existential Nihilist “...but there is no God, there is only the nothingness. That is all that awaits us. Aha, the greatest fear of man: losing one’s identity. Sad, I admit, but we are architects of our anxiety. Our awareness of our existence, our name, our face, our personality and the people we know, serve to give us the illusion that we are special and unique within the world. This illusion when threatened with nothing causes anxiety, the anxiety creates God. God is anxiety. I came to the conclusion not long ago, that we were no worse or better than the rats in the sewer. I was beaten up for saying it.”

“The best we can hope for is to wait it out and enjoy our time, the last few moments,” said The Scientist.

“Oh why prolong the inevitable. We should all just kill ourselves now. What does the black hole give us if we choose it?” asked The Priest.

“The black hole gives us unpredictability. We don’t know whether it will crush us or bring us to a new planet?”

“Ok, we have a choice to make. Do we stay back or venture into the darkness? We have to adjust the orbit of the ship to accommodate it and as such I need a decision promptly before it’s too late.”

“I thought we couldn’t move at all?”

“We can only move towards the black hole but we cannot move away from it.”

“The black hole of uncertainty,” said The Existential Nihilist. “I’d say we should go for it. We are as good as dead now anyhow.”

“But even if we do get channelled to a new existence, we will still be without oxygen. What are the chances that we will come out on a new planet that facilitates life? The odds are in the trillion of trillions.”

“This is it,” said The Scientist. “Even if we do survive the black hole we still have to hope that we are ejected into an Earth like planet. Forgive me people but it is all irrelevant. It is futile. So what do we do?”

“I think we should go towards the darkness,” said The Existential Nihilist.

“I am with you,” said The Scientist.

“We may as well go into it,” said The Priest.

“So that is three yea’s. We will go into the hole and hope for the best.”

“We will do it.”

She adjusted the controls on the command centre and manned the ship in the direction of the hole. The ship slowly altered its direction and pointed into the centre of the dark misty abyss. They could not see it except for the refraction of the star light that crossed its vicinity into their eyes. The black hole was about the size of a stadium and yet it was so majestic and so strong. They looked at each other and looked out and graced each other before they mounted the final assault of the universe and pushed the button to go in.

“Here’s to life and love. It was great knowing you,” said The Scientist. “Are we ready?”

They all nodded in agreement as The Scientist gripped the steering wheel and pulled back the thrust and slowly they inched towards the apex of the hole. They could feel the effects on the ship. The gravitational pull began to bend the struts and make the ship creak. They held onto each other as if they were stranded in the sea awaiting rescue. This was the final moment before it all. They looked out into the universe and tried to capture one last still of life before they took a step into the unknown. They saw their own reflection one last time and they looked into their own souls. Life would be no more. The lights in the command centre started to flicker as the noise began to increase. The shafts began to bend. Smoke gushed from the computer mainframes. Their lives flashed before them as they took one last look at each other, themselves and then they were slowly sucked in to the centre of the hole. The black hole swallowed them up like the liquid going down a sink drain. Life was no longer.

Darkness suddenly reigned over the spaceship. The lights flashed off in a second. The ship had flown into the hole and its almighty gravity had sucked them in with such pressure that it stretched them like spaghetti. The lights, the ship and their souls were crushed like flies. They were suspended in time. The laws of physics broke down. The memories of their lives reverberated in their consciousness. Now there was just a dark nothingness and life was no longer. Mankind was purged. Man was dead and so was any recollection that he ever

existed. The ship was no more. It was compressed into a flat two-dimensional object of little substance and those who inhabited it were zero.

The lights suddenly came on. Sean lay in a hospital bed by himself, drifting in and out of consciousness. The room was empty except for him. It was night time.

“This is how it ends, slowly dying with my soul starving. This is what I deserve, after what I did in my life, this pain is justified. We die alone, that I am certain of. There is no tranquillity or resurrection. It is life and nothing, light and darkness, calmness and apathy. God I wish I had only done this or not done that. My life would have been so much better. I made mistakes, I was wrong and criminal and I am very sorry to those I hurt. The only thing I can say is that I tried to become a better man because of my errors.”

“I kept messing up till I was twenty-three years old. Then I realized that it would be easier to just stay clear of man, much like the wild animal takes to the forest. When you deal with society, you cannot win. They will judge and judge. Sometimes the caged animal lives longer than the free animal, for when we are free to choose, we can choose wrong.”

“If perhaps I had fallen into the arms of the woman I loved, would I lie here content? I don’t know. But I am glad I learned young enough. If man was smart he would forego the common life in favour of living. The decisions we make in life cause us all sorts of problems. We don’t realize that by living we slowly die each day.”

“We are accountable for where we are and who we are. We cannot make excuses. We cannot blame the universe for our idiosyncrasies. We are who we are at this point in time. If only I could have seen the universe as I lived, I may have actually enjoyed my life. All this destruction and brutality and for what? No one realizes when they should, how good it is to exist. The stars and the darkness are kept from our view. Life becomes about the daily repetition to prostitute ourselves and the stress and anxieties that accompany being known. No one sees the universe. No one sees its indifference. We die without achieving much because we pour all our time and resources into love. I don’t think people appreciate the universe and how lucky we are to exist for it could so easily have been nothing. No coffee, no beauty and no life. If you think like that then maybe you would live differently. Man is silhouetted against the universe, against perpetual darkness. The world, when you boil it all down to its core means

nothing. It is nothing and we are fortunate to exist or have existed. There is no other planet or no other universe or no other life or no other love. This is all we have got. This is us."

He lay there content pondering the strangeness of the universe and all its mysterious ways. He looked out his window at the stars and wondered about whether there was another universe full of people. He saw himself when he was young dancing with Sibéal, the most beautiful woman he had ever known, that red dress she wore when he first laid eyes on her, how they ventured to America together and partied. He remembered how they lived their lives as only young people could do. Drinking cocktails and smoking and now all that was gone and he was just an old shadow full of regret. As he slipped in and out of life he saw a vision approach him in a red dress. Her face was young and colourful and full of youth. She was beautiful. Sibéal walked over and put her hand across his head. She helped him to his feet and they looked at each other like they used to do when they were young. They gazed into each other's eyes, with the stars shining all around them and such a deafening silence. They remembered how good life was and how they enjoyed being together. She slightly stepped back and did a little dance for him. Suddenly they were young again in America and dancing and enjoying life and what it could offer. They were on the beach, just the two of them, walking and dancing with the tides of the sea and the American sun was pouring down onto their youthful skin. They saw themselves as they were when they first set foot on the American Dream. Life was good back then. They were young and had no worries about the future.

"Remember that night dancing, beneath the stars, when we were only teenagers," she said as she slowly turned.

"I remember alright.....you were so beautiful....."

"I saw you outside you know....."

There was a silence as she slowly danced and he watched on as if she was the only thing in the world .

"Your favourite quote?" asked Sean of her.

"There are so many of them it's hard to pick one," she replied.

"If you stood on the edge of a tall cliff, overlooking the ocean and had to utter one last line, before you gave yourself away, what would it be?"

“That’s very morbid!”

“What would it be?”

“It would be: “Nothing behind me, everything ahead of me, as is ever so on the road.””

“That’s Kerouac isn’t it?”

“I read it”

“Did you!”

“No I didn’t. I was only joking. But I saw that quote on the internet and got it framed.”

“Cool. You’d like the book though.”

“What’s yours? You are on that cliff and time is up and the sun is slowly setting.”

“Mine would be “Nothing behind me, everything ahead.....””

“Be serious, be serious. I was,” she said smiling.

“Ok, it would be what Socrates said at his trial when he said he would rather choose death over silence: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” That is what it would be.”

There was a seductive silence as she slowly danced, but edged further away like a glowing red moon slipping out of a planets grasp.

“I am not sure what that means, but I know this much: The over examined life has not been lived,” she said melting into the shadows.

“True, very true.....very true.....” replied Sean with a tear in his eye.

The darkness of death returned. He lay on the hospital bed. He was losing consciousness. Sibéal slowly danced to the darkness of the universe, of despair, of the eternal nothingness. He took one last look at her. Such beauty can only happen when you are young. He thought of the times they watched the Lion King together and that great song filtered through his mind. He could feel the love one last time. The kings and vagabonds believed the very best. Her vibrant

red dress flittered in the silence, as she escaped his grasp. She quietly vanished into the shadows and he never saw her again. Life went on.

The End.